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LANGUAGE CHOICE IN A BILINGUAL ENVIRONMENT: MEDIA AND FAMILY
INFLUENCES ON SOUTHERN SLOVAKIAN CHILDREN

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Abstract

The Slovak Republic appeared on the map of Europe on January 1, 1993. In rhetoric and regulations the Slovak government led by Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar (in power between 1993 and 1998) began a deliberate and programmatic establishing of Slovak national identity as homogeneous and stable to the detriment of ethnic minorities that constitute fourteen per cent of Slovakia's five million inhabitants. I argue that an ethnic-linguistic understanding of nation involves a number of levels, such as legal, political, social and cultural and process like re-writing of history, invention of tradition together with psychic influences, for example in the form of identification with the Leader. I demonstrate that language is a key component of identity and a field in which power is contested. This is exemplified for example by attempts at regulating the use of minority languages in public; in the Slovak case a language law was passed in 1995 that prevents minorities from using their languages in dealing with state administration and public institutions. Intervention in language use is particularly alarming because it can lead to the effective disappearance of a language/s. I conducted a study in the largely bilingual (Slovak-Hungarian) area of southern Slovakia that explores children's language choice in relation to television viewing and sheds light on the complexities of ethnic identities in contemporary Slovakia. The sample included Slovak, Hungarian as well as bilingual/biethnic children. The findings suggest that ethnic Hungarian children educated in Hungarian and living in monoethnic/monolingual households associate themselves more strongly with the Hungarian ethnic group than their counterparts educated in Slovak and/or living in biethnic/bilingual households. Children, however, show awareness of both the local realities of their lives as well as larger global influences in relation to language choice as well as television programmes.

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INTRODUCTION

On January 1, 1993 following the breakup of Czechoslovakia a new state, the Slovak Republic, appeared on the map of Europe. In 1995 the Slovak National Council, in which governing parties had a two-third majority, passed a controversial language law that restricted the use of minority languages. The passing of the language law was only one, though arguably the most serious, instance in which an active, government sponsored construction of "homogeneous" Slovak nation manifested itself. The conduct of national minorities, especially in the field of language use, became highly politicised and had an immediate impact on ethnic minorities as well as on the Slovak majority. These developments took place in a state that started building democracy only recently and where legal and institutional mechanisms that protect the rights of minorities were and are still largely missing. Moreover, Slovakia's ethnic minorities live in areas where national borders frequently shifted and thus find themselves in a complex and dual relationship to Slovakia and the neighbouring countries with which they associate themselves in cultural terms. To understand this duality in identities as typical of the post-modern era and enabling in terms of multiplicity and flexibility, I believe, grossly underestimates the consequences of nation construction on the immediate, everyday lives of Slovakia's five million inhabitants. Furthermore such an understanding of duality disguises the fact that choices in terms of identities are often restricted and in some cases decisions made about "belonging" are involuntary, for example the result of forced exchanges of inhabitants over which they have little or no control. Aspects of this duality and its consequences demonstrate themselves very visibly in the processes of socialisation and enculturation of members of ethnic minorities and I discuss these processes in detail in Chapters III and IV.

Although there is nothing like a unified and stable Slovak national culture, there are discursive practices and systems of representation that create the sense of a homogeneous national culture and identity. I argue in Chapter II that in the case of Slovakia the construction of nationhood and statehood demonstrates itself on political and cultural levels and includes selectivity in a re-writing of history and re-imagining of the past as well as the invention of tradition and psychic processes that include identification with the "Leader", Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar, who was in power until November 1998 and presented himself as the "supreme protector" of Slovakia's interests. The spread of consumerism and globalisation that followed after the fall of communism is thus in Slovakia matched with an emergence of nationalism.

The sense of homogeneity that was actively promoted in Slovakia does not make it possible to acknowledge the role of ethnic groups in the "imagining" of the overarching national identity and culture. Members of ethnic minorities constitute fourteen per cent of Slovakia's inhabitants and include Hungarians (more than ten per cent of Slovakia's inhabitants), Roma (about one and a half percent) and smaller groups such as Czechs, Poles, Ruthenians, Ukrainians and Russians. Since minorities are effectively excluded from Slovak national identity but at the same they are citizens of the Slovak Republic the way in which they can (and to an extent have to) identify with the state is through the national identity that they have been effectively denied. I discuss complexities of this dual position in Chapters II and IV and deal with ways in which it is reflected in children's understanding of identity in Chapter VI.

One of the core aspects of national identity and culture is language. Language involves more than a tool for communication, it is a constitutive component of culture and identity as well as an important tool in the processes of socialisation and enculturation. Moreover, as the case of Slovakia demonstrates, language is also an area

in which power is contested. Slovakia has a "single" national language, Slovak, which is at the same time the single official language. However, fourteen per cent of its inhabitants have a mother tongue other than Slovak. As I explain in Chapter I languages are not stable, not only in terms of their historical development, but also in terms of fields in which they can be used. In order for a language to be maintained it has to be available in as many fields of language conduct as possible. Government policies can play an active role in the promotion and restriction of the use of languages in different fields. The Slovak government made an attempt at restricting the fields in which minority languages can be used in the language law that was passed in 1995. The language law partially restricts the use of minority languages in media, culture, public signs and denominations. The law makes the use of minority languages in official conduct, that is in the citizen's dealings with the administrative and institutional bodies of the state, impossible. This, however, is in contradiction with *The Constitution of the Slovak Republic* that guarantees the right of using minority languages in official conduct which nonetheless did not prevent the Slovak government from passing the law. The situation is made further complicated by an ethnic-linguistic understanding of nation as it makes it impossible to separate citizenship and nation which has serious implications for identification with state, nation and ethnic group as I demonstrate in Chapters I and II.

The spheres in which minority languages need protection include those of education and media. In Slovakia there is education in minority languages available for the Ukrainian and Hungarian minorities. The minority education system includes kindergartens and primary schools and also secondary schools in the case of the Hungarian minority. Schools with minority languages as languages of teaching are available in areas where the minority is concentrated and they provide education in the

mother tongue with compulsory classes of Slovak which is taught as a foreign language. The Slovak government made a number of attempts at "regulating" teaching in minority languages. The first among these efforts was to introduce teachers of Slovak ethnicity as teachers of Slovak language and literature in 1995. In the majority of minority schools all teachers belong to the ethnic group in whose language they teach. The second, more important effort came with a proposal of a law in 1996 that would introduce the teaching of three subjects -- geography, history and physical education -- in Slovak, apart from the compulsory classes of Slovak language and literature. The government did not last long enough to see into the passing of this law as it lost the elections of September 1998 and since then a coalition of parties, including a Hungarian party, formed a "new" government. But before its departure the government prohibited the issuing of transcripts in two languages which has been a practice in minority schools since 1921, thus putting further pressure on minority groups.

In the sphere of media the Slovak government clearly promoted Slovak culture on state-run television channels. Infrequent programmes in minority languages took the form of news bulletins from different regions of Slovakia. Despite that the majority of ethnic groups, as they inhabit border regions, are able to watch television programmes in their mother tongues that are broadcast from the neighbouring countries. In terms of print media there are newspapers available in some of the minority languages; their publishing is outside state control but is subsidised by the state which although indirectly but still puts them under state control. Media globalisation has demonstrated itself in Slovakia in the availability of satellite and cable television, with about seventy-five per cent of Slovak households having access to one of them. Media globalisation can have implications for the construction of identities, I deal with them in the particular circumstances of southern Slovakian children in Chapter VI.

Although I concentrated on the conduct of minorities, I would like to stress that the government's policies and attitudes also had an impact on Slovaks. During the years of Mečiar's government the Slovak society became polarised and divided especially because the policies implemented in relation to ethnic minorities bore the characteristics of authoritarian and undemocratic conduct. This polarisation is also reflected in attitudes that Slovaks developed, for example, in relation to the Hungarian minority and these suggest that political affiliation played an important role in the evaluation of policies on minority conduct.

Wherever diverse cultural groups come into first-hand contact identity acquires a new dimension. In Chapter III I argue that one of the determining factors in cultural contact is who is making the decisions about its course. It can be argued that this does not fully apply to the case of Slovakia since minorities living in its territory have been in first-hand contact with Slovaks for centuries and they have become integrated into the society. Yet national and ethnic identity is not given and stable; rather it is acquired in the processes of socialisation and enculturation. These processes begin in early childhood and happen on a number of levels. In early stages of socialisation and enculturation family plays an important role in the processes. Children are further socialised and enculturated at school but other agents such as church, peers and media, play an equally important role in the process.

Slovaks undergo socialisation into national identity and enculturation into national culture while members of ethnic minorities undergo a more complex process. They are socialised into ethnic identity and to national identity and enculturated into national culture and ethnic culture. Socialisation into national identity and enculturation into national culture for minorities present contradictions since they are not primarily included in the perceived "homogeneous" Slovak nation; yet aspects of Slovak national

identity and culture form an essential part of their being citizens of Slovakia. Because of this complexity and duality children belonging to minority groups find themselves growing up with contesting identities. The processes of socialisation and enculturation can be made even further complicated in an atmosphere of openly confrontational policies applied in the area of minority conduct. Children may not understand the complexity of choices that they are making and the processes that are happening to them and around them yet the overall atmosphere is likely to influence their understanding of both ethnic and national identity and consequently attitudes to Slovaks as well as to other minorities. The complexities of socialisation and enculturation in Slovakia are explored in Chapter IV.

Socialisation and enculturation indeed play an important role in the acquisition of attitudes, beliefs and prejudices about cultural groups that co-exist in Slovakia. Such attitudes often involve negative stereotyping that can easily gain strength in the atmosphere that prevailed in Slovakia under Mečiar's government. Negative stereotypes and prejudices do not necessarily manifest themselves in the form of racial and ethnic discrimination, they can also be part of political rhetoric. In Slovakia the chairman of the Slovak National Party is notoriously known for presenting extreme views regarding the Hungarian ethnic minority.

The situation of various ethnic minorities living in Slovakia can differ significantly due to their size as well as concentration on relatively compact areas. The Hungarian minority is concentrated to a large extent in southern and eastern Slovakia along the border with Hungary. Hungarians have lived in this region for centuries but the region has gone through numerous shifts in its territorial status. After the First World War it became part of the newly founded Czechoslovakia; in 1938 following the Munich Agreement it was annexed to Nazi Hungary. After the Second World War the

area was handed back to the Slovak part of Czechoslovakia and the leadership of the Slovak Communist Party made an effort to deport all the 600,000 Hungarians who found themselves once again part of Czechoslovakia to Hungary. Although Slovak Hungarians did not have much say in the annexation of southern and eastern Slovakia to Hungary this event still lives in popular imagination as an act of betrayal on the part of Slovak Hungarians. Some Slovaks, among them the chairman of the Slovak National Party, are convinced that Slovak Hungarians are only awaiting the chance to fulfil their secessionist plans. This perception deepened under the years of Mečiar's government.

Children's language choice in relation to television viewing provides a ground on which to explore the complexities of ethnic identities in contemporary Slovakia. Media play a role in children's socialisation into national/ethnic identities and in their learning to identify cultural difference. In border regions with ethnically mixed populations viewing television programmes involves language choices and since television viewing occurs mostly in the family context parents are able to exercise control and influence over children's language choice in relation to television viewing which may be an important tool in children's socialisation and enculturation.

In order to explore these issues I carried out a study in the town of Štúrovo which has 13,320 inhabitants and 73.8 per cent of them belong to the Hungarian national minority according to data from 1990. The town lies on the border with Hungary by the river Danube. Throughout its history Štúrovo has gone through changes in terms of territorial "status". The settlement has been Roman, Magyar, Turkish, Hungarian, Turkish again, Austro-Hungarian, Czechoslovak, Hungarian, Czechoslovak again and finally Slovak. Television channels broadcasting in Slovak and Hungarian are available in the town and in addition to those many households are equipped with satellite or cable television.

The town has a wide range of Slovak and Hungarian kindergartens, a Slovak and a Hungarian primary school as well as a Slovak and a Hungarian secondary school. The study involved second-graders from the Slovak and the Hungarian primary schools as the language of education is a major factor in children's socialisation and enculturation. Children attending the Hungarian school have, at the time the study was conducted, only been learning Slovak for two years and they came from families in which Hungarian was used most of the time. Second-graders in the Slovak school had no formal education in Hungarian and they included children whose mother tongues were Slovak or Hungarian although the large majority of children in the Slovak school proved to be bilingual at least in terms of watching television programmes.

I selected quantitative and qualitative methods for the purposes of my study. The core of the study consisted of focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and exercises with children in school clubs. Questions concerned a number of areas, among them children's use of television, favourite programmes, identification with characters, interactions around television and questions that concentrated on children's understanding of cultural markers and notions about the importance of languages. Thirty second-graders (seventeen boys and thirteen girls) took part in focus group discussions and exercises in the Slovak primary school compared to twenty-one (fifteen boys and six girls) in the Hungarian school. Eighteen individual interviews were conducted in the Slovak school with twelve girls and six boys. Thirteen children (three girls and ten boys) were involved in the individual interviews in the Hungarian school.

The findings of the study are explored in Chapter VI and they indicate that children in both schools are aware of cultural differences yet those that are educated in Hungarian and tend to use only Hungarian at home show a more uncertain and

ambiguous attitude toward Slovak language and television viewing in Slovak than children whose mother tongue is Hungarian but are educated in Slovak.

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter I provides a theoretical framework on national identity while Chapter II discusses national identity in Slovakia. Chapter III develops the theoretical framework on socialisation and cultural accommodation which I use in the subsequent chapter for an analysis of these processes in Slovakia. Chapter V deals with theoretical issues concerning research on child audiences, narratives and language choice. Chapter VI is devoted to the study on language choice and media influence on southern Slovakian children. In each theoretical section I discuss "Western" literature and its possible application, as well as shortcomings, relating to the East Central European region.

CHAPTER I

NATIONAL IDENTITY

In this chapter I outline the theoretical framework for a discussion of national identities in Slovakia. This framework takes into account contributions of "Western" theorists on the issues connected to the construction of nations and at the same time discusses aspects of national identity that are particular to the East Central European region. It has been widely accepted that nation is an imagined community, a system of cultural signification that has emerged as the outcome of discursive practices. Nations are, nonetheless, often presented as having unified and homogeneous national cultures frequently to the detriment of minority groups living in their territory. However, there are fewer than ten per cent of states of the world that are also nations (Wardhaugh 1987); in other words only a fragment of all states are monoethnic. For the minorities living in the rest of them the ethnic-linguistic understanding of nation can have grave implications. Such implications manifest themselves in a very telling way on a number of levels, two of which, language and media, are of particular concern to my argument.

To define nation as an "imagined political community" (Anderson 1983) provides a useful starting point for my discussion of national identity. But in order to understand the process of identification with a nation one needs to take into account, apart from the political, also the cultural level on which nations imagine themselves. National cultures tend to be presented as stable, continuous and timeless. Yet there is nothing like a unified and homogeneous national culture; rather there are discursive practices and systems of representation that create the sense of cultural unity and continuity on the national level. Indeed, as Morley and Robins (1995) argue, nation is the outcome (rather than the origin) of different discursive apparatuses, technologies and institutions that produce national culture.

It would, nonetheless, be oversimplified to argue that the political and cultural levels on which nations are imagined are the only ones that play a role in the construction of national identity. One also needs to take into account "selective processes of memory" (Morley and Robins 1995), the invention of tradition and psychic processes that can play a decisive role in the construction of national identity. Slavoj Žižek points out the omission of psychic processes (such as fear of the Other) in discussions of nation as discourse and system of cultural signification. He argues convincingly that the drive to restore enjoyment that was supposedly taken away by Others of whom we need to purify Ourselves is the leading force behind the construction of national identity and consequently nationalism. However, it is impossible to restore enjoyment as "*we never possessed what was allegedly stolen from us: the lack ('castration') is original: enjoyment constitutes itself as 'stolen', or, to quote Hegel's precise formulation from his *Science of Logic*, it only 'comes to be through being left behind'*" (1992: 197, original emphasis). Žižek's standpoint can explain some of the psychic processes involved in the construction of national identity and "the theft of enjoyment argument" which I stated in its simplest terms fits within developments in Slovakia. In addition, developments in the East Central European region demonstrate that psychic processes play a role not only in the identification with a nation but also in the identification with a national Leader, such leaders include Slovakia's former Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar.

National identity, similarly to national culture, is not stable and given rather "a matter of negotiation and exchange" (Kiberd, 1995 :1). Although it has become widely accepted that each of us assumes multiple identities which are constantly reimagined and recreated, the way in which national identity is constructed and presented can very significantly restrict this assumed multiplicity of identities. In the East Central

European region states are imagined and represented as monolithic nation states. Thus national identity is constructed in ways that promote the sense of a unified homogeneous nation. Such a construction of national identity has particularly far-reaching effects on minority populations as the "abstract" construction of national identity (for example in the form of national anthem and national history) can go hand in hand with active state intervention aimed at homogenising the nation (such as language policies and minority education).

National and ethnic identities are contested in a particularly complex way in the East Central European region. The frequent geographical as well as discursive shifts result in complex and unstable identities and often in an urgency on the part of majority populations to "stabilise" identity to the detriment of minorities. An incorporation of minority cultures within the overarching national culture and identity is currently unrealistic as in many cases ethnic groups construct their identities in binary opposition to each other. Moreover, as I argue in the case of Slovakia, the construction of national identity can be an immediate, programmatic and intentional process.

The impact of globalisation on identities is of major concern to "Western" theorists (Hall 1992, Morley and Robins 1995, Giddens 1990). It seems that rather than understanding the effects of globalisation as either homogenising with the promotion of global consumer values or strengthening local identities as a form of resistance to globalising tendencies, the two effects should be understood as complementary. Although globalisation and consumerism gained ground in the East Central European region after the fall of communism, their impact on identities is difficult to assess. A clear break-up of strong identities can hardly be observed and the perceived strengthening of local identities that manifests itself in some cases in the form of open nationalism is likely to be due to the changed geopolitical situation rather than a radical

impact of globalisation. As Kürti and Langman argue "the reemergence of local identities may have no direct relationship to state socialism or western capitalism *per se*, although each may be seen as a prerequisite" (1997: 7).

Having briefly outlined what I consider key issues in a discussion of national identity I would like to turn to a concrete area of national culture -- language. Yang and Bond argue that "culture influences thought either directly, through the socialization of the individual within a culture, or indirectly, as the individual learns the language of a culture -- language being an evolved cultural pattern" (1995: 2). Each nation has a national language (in a better case languages) in which it represents its culture and constructs its identity. East Central European countries, like many others, each have a single national language and usually a single official language. This makes the relationship of minorities with distinct languages¹ to the nation that neither promotes nor accepts minority languages a highly problematic one. Moreover, language use does not only constitute a part of culture and identity but also has social implications not only on minority groups as such but on each individual within those groups.

Languages were, in fact, at the birth of modern nations. The diversity of languages was influenced by capitalism and the emerging print technology in such a way that it created the possibility of a new form of imagined community which then gave rise to the modern nation (Anderson 1983). Stuart Hall (1992) argues that national culture is also a power structure and since language is its constitutive element, it

¹ In some cases distinct languages are mutually understandable (for example the case of Czech and Slovak) yet their status (as languages of nations co-existing in a state) has to be determined by law. Since Czechoslovakia consisted of two founding nations it also had two official languages. The situation of ethnic minorities that are not considered founding nations and whose languages are not related in any way to the majority language find themselves in a particularly "vulnerable" position. This is, for example, the case of Hungarian in Slovakia. The two languages come from different language families, Ugro-Finnic and Slavic respectively, thus for Hungarian to be maintained its availability in the public sphere is absolutely essential.

becomes an area in which power is contested. This is particularly true when we look at the way in which states (or more precisely nation states as they are still imagined in this way) actively interfere in their inhabitants' language use and the way in which this interference affects the cultural, political and social realms. The state's intervention in language use is a significant tool for maintaining the sense of a unified national identity often to the detriment of minority language groups.

Languages are not stable, not only in the sense of their historical development but also in terms of language use by individuals and communities. There are a number of factors that play a role in the spread and maintenance of languages, in their decline and even death.² Although language spread as such is not of major concern for my argument, I would like to point to Ronald Wardhaugh's (1987) list of major factors that influence it. These factors include the attitude people adopt to both the threatened and the threatening languages, the relationships among the speakers of the various languages, "modernisation" and ideological (cultural, political, religious) beliefs of the different language groups involved. I am leaving aside the "modernisation argument" according to which certain languages are doomed to "death" because they are not adapted to the needs of the modern world as they have not "progressed" since it has been attacked from many sides for example because of its evident ethnocentrism (Williams 1992). The three remaining factors provide a useful starting point for a discussion of the relations among language use, identity and the role of the state. Moreover, these factors recur within different issues related to language use and national identity.

Before turning to the role of language in the construction and maintenance of a unified national identity and the pressures to which minority groups are subjected, let

me briefly consider what constitutes and characterises a minority group. Among the attributes of ethnic minorities Wardhaugh (1987) lists objective ones such as language, religion, cultural characteristics, institutional arrangements and historical tradition and subjective ones such as feelings about identity and shared interests. These clearly are also the basic characteristics of a nation. The crucial question then is what makes an ethnic group a minority. Will Kymlicka argues that national minorities are "groups which formed functioning societies, with their own institutions, culture and language, concentrated in a particular territory, prior to being incorporated into a larger state" (1998: 4). The issue of incorporation of groups with functioning societies into larger states is another problematic one in relation to the East Central European region. Many ethnic groups have found themselves in the position of minorities after the creation of new states following the First and Second World Wars. However, borders frequently shifted also between the wars and moreover members of ethnic minorities in one country would belong to the majority in a neighbouring country which further complicates attitudes to identities on part of majorities as well as minorities.

Although the proportion of inhabitants belonging to a certain group can determine their minority status³, Wardhaugh (1987) adds that social organisation and the place of the members of the minority in the society can be determining when deciding about minority status. The same applies to a minority language, members of an ethnic minority group may indeed feel that their language is subordinate to that used by a different group (or groups). The subjective attitudes of minority language users may also be significantly influenced by whether the language they speak is a majority

² The terminology is telling in itself. We talk about endangered languages, linguistic genocide, language death etc.

³ The size of a minority group in proportion to the overall population within a district, for example, usually determines the availability of schools with education in minority language/s and the possibility of using the minority language/s in official conduct.

language somewhere else. In case it is, the geographical distance of the "mother tongue country"⁴ becomes also important both in a subjective way but also in terms of political and social implications. This is indeed a major factor, as I have already suggested, relating to the status of minorities in the East Central European region. The easy access to "mother tongue countries" is often perceived as a threat by a nation since it is understood as a destabilising factor, both in terms of national identity as well as territorial integrity.

Another very important point about language use and minorities is made by Wardhaugh (1987) who, similarly to Morley and Robins (1995), claims that a determining feature of an ethnic minority can be the patterns of boundary-maintaining behaviour. According to him unilingualism suggests very strong boundary-maintenance whilst multilingualism weakens some of the boundaries. This is certainly a valid argument but it also needs to be born in mind that the choices regarding language use are often involuntary, for example, the result of language planning and policies aimed at assimilation.

Language use in linguistically mixed areas has been mostly studied for code-switching (Susan Gal 1987) yet the analyses of code-switching, as Glyn Williams (1992) rightly points out, fail to take into account political aspects of language use and so does the discipline of sociolinguistics at large. Another major field of study and indeed implementation in mixed areas has been language planning. Officially language planning is intended to promote the integration of ethnic minorities into the society

⁴I use the term "mother tongue country" to denote the state where the language of an ethnic minority is the official language rather than the term "mother country" since it supposedly denotes loyalty to a different country from the one in which a member of an ethnic minority resides. In some countries (and Slovakia is no exception in this) loyalty of an ethnic minority group to the "mother tongue country" is perceived as being "greater" than that to the country of residence. However, I would argue that each of us has multiple loyalties which do not necessarily contradict each other.

often by promoting the use of official language and restricting the use of minority languages. However, such integration could at its worst involve language death and even the eradication of cultures since "one of the most important determinants of whether a culture survives is whether its language is the language of government - i.e. the language of public schooling, courts, legislatures, welfare agencies, health services etc." (Kymlicka, 1995: 111). In a similar vein Glyn Williams argues that language planning disguises attempts at creating a sense of homogeneous national culture and identity.

There is an unquestioned equation of the state with the nation. The nation is, in turn, presented as undifferentiated and united, with a 'national language' existing to serve the entire population of that state. Nation is counterposed with region in the characteristic state discourse which refuses minority nationalism, this merely revealing the shared interests of language planning and the state. ... There is an implicit assumption that the benevolence of the state permits members of the minority language group to attain the prerequisites of upward social mobility as well as both economic and social integration within the wider society, thereby reducing discrimination based upon language while simultaneously guaranteeing altruistic responses on the part of the state to the demands of the minority. The net result is that, rather than being discriminated against by the dominant society, the boundary is created by the members of the minority language group's tendency towards self-categorisation (1992: 130-131).

The survival of languages and consequently cultures depends upon the possibility of expanding language use into new domains of language activity. That is why the interference of state in this matter is of crucial importance. If a language is forced into the private sphere, its survival can be seriously threatened. What is at stake, however, is not only the survival of a language and culture but also individual choices that are restricted by states on unacceptable grounds. Such restrictions are particularly visible when a homogeneous national identity and single national language is fiercely promoted by a government denouncing rights of minority groups as well as rights and freedoms of individual citizens.

On the other hand, national legislations all over the world proved to be insufficient for protecting cultural and language rights of minorities and their individual members. Two solutions for the better protection of cultural and language rights have gained strong support. One solution involves the implementation of group rights, the other advocates the supplementing of individual human rights by language rights. Williams (1992) argues for the implementation of group rights which is perhaps a more problematic solution than the supplementing of individual human rights by language rights. Individual human rights are, at least in theory, implemented generally while group rights can face serious obstacles already at the point of deciding what constitutes minority groups eligible for protection. Setting up a "quota" in relation to group rights can be easily abused by those in power. This has been demonstrated in gerrymandering which was the driving force behind the Slovak governments' reform of administrative territorial units.

One can suggest that individual human rights are sufficient in protecting minorities, for example regarding rights to use minority languages. Yet if we look at the implementation of such rights this argument proves to be irrelevant. Kymlicka (1998) demonstrates that human rights are not only insufficient but they can actually exacerbate injustices in three areas: decisions about internal migration/settlement policies; decisions about the boundaries and powers of internal political units and decisions about official languages. He suggests that human rights be supplemented by minority rights and new domestic, regional or transnational mechanisms which will hold governments accountable for respecting both human rights and minority rights be established. In a similar vein Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (1998) trace the insufficiencies of cultural rights and human rights covenants and agreements regarding language maintenance. Their argument for the implementation of language rights within

human rights is twofold. On the one hand it resembles Kymlicka's and goes even further in terms of extreme cases such as linguistic genocide and in addition they also argue that language diversity and biodiversity go hand and in hand, one is not possible without the other.

Changes in legislation and in the understanding of cultural and language rights are essential not only for ensuring the rights of minority groups or individuals who belong to them but they would also ensure that the state's conduct in minority issues does not favour and actively promote a particular understanding of national identity. Kymlicka (1995) convincingly argues that the notion that state and ethnicity are strictly separated is wrong. The state unavoidably promotes some cultures over others and this is certainly a valid point in relation to the official language/s. Kymlicka also attacks the argument that the cultural free market needs no intervention on the same ground. States undoubtedly influence the cultural market by allocating resources to certain cultures and not others.

Such promotion of certain cultures is visible in some East Central European countries where the situation is aggravated by the lack of institutional and legal mechanisms that would rule out discrimination of this type.⁵ The task of creating such mechanisms is even more pressing due to the communist "heritage" in the sphere of ethnic relations. Communism did not promote difference and multiplicity; rather the major and indeed sole interest in terms of the communist leadership's understanding of identity lay in the creation of class consciousness: being a member of the working class came before any other affiliations. The "homogenising" tendencies (or "equalising" as they are still remembered in popular imagination) appeared to be universal and

⁵ Although the creation of a legal and institutional framework is in itself not a guarantee that state promoted cultural discrimination will cease, I believe it is a necessary prerequisite.

constructed a sense of a unified national and indeed class identity which has been disintegrating since the beginning of the 1990's.

In terms of concrete areas in which minority languages need protection, de Varennes (1996) lists six in which minority language protection is absolutely vital for the maintenance of language. I also use his categorisation, at least partly, in my analysis of language use in Slovakia. The areas identified by de Varennes include education, institutions, names and toponymy, script prohibition, media and publications and the use of minority languages at home and in public. Let me first of all comment briefly on the area of education. It has been argued that education in the mother tongue (in this case a minority language) does not only improve the knowledge of its speakers quicker compared to members of minority groups educated in the majority (official) language but also children educated in their mother tongue are quicker at learning the majority language when compared to their peers, minority language speakers, who are educated in the majority language (Milian, 1996: 2). Perhaps even more important than the acquisition of knowledge is the fact that education in the mother tongue is important because of acquiring the language itself which is a crucial component of culture and identity. The notion that "language rights in education are important because intergenerational transmission of languages is the most vital factor for their maintenance" (Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson, 1998: 36) is also stressed by writers on issues concerning minority language maintenance (Williams, 1992, Kymlicka 1998, de Varennes, 1996).

The second area is that of other institutions such as cultural, political and social ones. I have already argued that languages which are spoken in these fields have a direct impact on minority populations. The field of names and toponymy has not yet been mentioned. States often exercise their power in this area in an intolerant way.

Because "a name ... is an important marker that a person belongs to a community and any state restriction on the use of a person's name in a minority language would be particularly offensive for many, and a direct intervention in what is by its very nature an extremely private affair" (de Varennes, 1996: 160), this field has often been a point of clashes between the state and ethnic minorities.⁶

Script prohibition is an area which can have a significant impact since it can effectively remove a language from the public (and even the private) sphere. Script prohibition, however, is not an issue in the case of Slovakia, so I am not dealing with it in any depth. The next area that de Varennes identifies is media and publications. This area is of crucial importance for my argument and I return to it in the following section. The use of minority languages at home or in public is the final category. Governments regulate the use of minority languages in public by law while the use of languages in the private sphere, apart from extreme cases, depends on the individual's choice. Nonetheless, language use in public and private has specific implications for each country since legislation related to it can differ significantly and I analyse it in relation to Slovakia in the next chapter.

While languages and print capitalism were at the birth of the modern nation, media are at its "maintenance". In relation to East Central Europe Kürti and Langman (1997) point out that media played a significant role in the fall of communism and consequently in the promotion of democracy and creation of new nation states.

Media can play a significant and at least twofold role in the construction of national identity and promotion of national culture. First of all, they can construct the

⁶ In some countries of the East Central European region parents can choose their child's first name from a registered list of first names. If the choice involves a non-registered name usually the permission of the state's institution that deals with names and toponymy, the institutions are often part of the language branch of academies of science, is required.

sense of a unified national culture by giving space only to certain cultures while others are either left out or openly attacked and secondly the presence of certain languages in the media can be restricted, thus effectively creating the sense of the sufficiency of a single language for the whole nation. State-controlled media can be openly used for the promotion of national identity as well as political and ideological beliefs. In democratic societies mechanisms have been established that attempt to guarantee the impartiality of public broadcasting but such mechanisms are still missing in some of the countries of the East Central European region. Even privately-owned media can be put under pressure from governments in order to comply with "state interests". In the end it is the state that distributes radio and television frequencies.⁷

In the case of minorities the geographical closeness of the "mother tongue countries" can make the availability of broadcasting in their mother tongues easily available, thus providing an important means of accessing minority cultures.⁸ This in some cases may be perceived as threatening and states may try to prevent their inhabitants from access to mother tongue broadcasting. Yet even if states do not actively restrict the availability of mother tongue broadcasting, it can be argued that it should be the responsibility of the state to provide programmes in the languages of ethnic minorities on state-controlled television channels. Moreover members of ethnic minorities should perhaps have a role in decision-making related to broadcasting in minority languages. The practice of broadcasting in minority languages on state-

⁷ The reasons for effectively "switching off" radio stations and television channels are not necessarily connected with nation building as such. In the case of the Slovak radio station Twist that was unable to broadcast because of state intervention (on October 13, 1997 its broadcasting was disconnected for twenty-five hours) the causes were political as the radio carried out investigations into the undemocratic practices of the government. However, in fact, it can be argued that these undemocratic principles were presented as an important part of national identity, as these were claimed to represent the unique and original Slovak way.

controlled television in the East Central European region has significant shortcomings.

The programmes are infrequent and often take the form of regional news bulletins.

"New media"⁹ have become available in East Central Europe after the fall of communism. In the late 1980's satellite and cable television and videos began to spread in the region. At the time the access to global broadcasting was strongly resisted even by relatively "mild" communist regimes (such as the Hungarian one) for ideological reasons (Szekfü, 1989). By now, satellite and cable television are widely available and the globalisation of media in general, is no longer perceived as an ideological threat. It can, nonetheless, be understood as a threat to national culture and national values. It is not only that satellite and cable televisions mostly broadcast programmes in foreign languages but even the programmes that are broadcast in the local languages are in the vast majority of cases of American origin.¹⁰

In this respect what Morley and Robins say about the countries of the European Union also applies to the East Central European region. "It is the anglophone, and principally American, audiovisual media that are cutting horizontally across the world audience, engaging the attention and mobilising the enthusiasm of popular audiences, and often binding them into cultural unities that are transnational" (1995: 62). It would thus seem that the globalisation of media and new technologies in particular, have "worryingly negative consequences for established national (and indeed continental) identities, and, at the same time, have potentially unpolicable and thus 'disturbing' effects, not only in disaggregating established audiences/communities, but also in

⁸ Obviously geographical closeness of the mother tongue country also makes access to theatres and other cultural institutions in the mother tongue easier.

⁹ The term is used in "Western" theories for media (such as computers) that are available in only a fraction of households in the East Central European region.

¹⁰ It is doubtless that programming in the East Central European region is dominated by American programmes; yet I would also point to the popularity of south American telenovelas at least in Hungary and Slovakia.

creating new ones across national boundaries" (Morley and Robins, 1995: 43).

However, the relationship between the prevailing influence of American film industry and the perceived erosion of strong cultural identities is not straightforward. Morley and Robins argue that one needs to take into account the limited exportability of American culture. Thus rather than drawing hasty conclusions they suggest that the most important issues

concern the role of these technologies in disrupting established boundaries (at national and domestic levels, simultaneously) and in rearticulating the private and public spheres in new ways. Our argument is that analysis of the process of creation of new image spaces and cultural identities needs to be grounded in the analysis of the everyday practices and domestic rituals through which contemporary electronic communities are constituted and reconstructed (at both micro- and macro-levels) on a daily basis (1995: 64).

In the case of East Central European countries the assessment of globalising aspects of media runs into added difficulties. All the programmes (apart from those on satellite and cable television) are dubbed and broadcast in the local languages for example on Slovak, Czech and Hungarian television channels. Thus there may be global values presented in television programmes but still there are relatively few television channels available, there is no diversity in language terms in locally broadcast television programmes and moreover there is no diversity regarding ethnicities in locally made television programmes.¹¹ It is also interesting that audiences are indeed created across national boundaries partly because of the cultural values that are presented in "global" television programmes but in the East Central European region also because of language as members of ethnic minorities view television programmes that are broadcast from neighbouring countries in their mother tongue. It is true that programmes broadcast on different television

channels are similar and often the same soap operas are broadcast on different language channels yet, language, in relation to television viewing, provides an important ground for group belonging and differentiation.

Language is a highly politicised area, "being intimately connected to economic and social mobility in today's society. Whilst separation of state and religion has become largely possible, the separation of state and language is no longer a realistic goal" (de Varennes, 1996: 1). Many countries in the world still define themselves in an ethnic-linguistic way which opens up possibilities for clashes and even open nationalistic tendencies. The eradication of certain languages or the strong promotion of them have been components of official nationalism (Anderson, 1983). The "late-comers to nationalism", to use Hobsbawm's term, include countries of the East Central European region. One of the major problems in this region is the unwillingness, or perhaps inability due to the specific ways in which nations are imagined and the geopolitical realities of East Central Europe, to separate ethnicity from citizenship. Inhabitants of a country are often not looked upon as its citizens but as speakers of a particular language, as members of a non-majority cultural group. Many of these distinctions, as I demonstrate in the case of Slovakia in the following chapter, are outdated and irrational yet bear enormous significance. That is why Eric Hobsbawm's argument that an ethnic-linguistic understanding of nations is outdated for at least three reasons: "we no longer live entirely in a culture of reading and writing" ... "we live in a *necessarily* plurilingual world" and "there is a single language for universal global communication, namely a version of English" (1996: 1073), does not necessarily reflect the realities of East Central Europe. Some East Central European governments play a

¹¹ The same applies to television reporters and presenters. In 1999 in the Czech Republic two members of the Roma ethnic group work as presenters on the Czech state-run television channel.

more active role in the promotion of the sense of a homogeneous national identity than others but the immediacy of the ethnic-linguistic understanding of nation is clear throughout the region. Dangerous situations are created in cases when the promotion of national identity does not only go hand in hand with restrictions regarding the conduct of ethnic minorities but also with undemocratic political practices. Language use and media are only two spheres in which active state intervention presents itself, creating divisions and polarisation within society. Construction of national identity is not necessarily passive, it can, under certain circumstances, be very actively and purposefully promoted by governments through different channels and on different levels but always with severe implications as I demonstrate in the case of Slovakia in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II

NATIONAL IDENTITY/IES IN SLOVAKIA¹²

In this chapter I demonstrate that the construction of the Slovak national identity as homogeneous and stable involved an active and programmatic process led and sponsored by Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar's government (in power between 1993 and 1998 with a nine-month interruption). The construction of Slovak national identity included a number of levels, among them the cultural and political and was on the symbolic level accompanied by a re-writing of history, re-imagining of the past and the active invention of tradition. Psychic processes, among them fear of the Other and identification with the "Leader" Prime Minister Mečiar played a key role in the process. The way in which Slovak national identity was constructed and imagined did not only have detrimental effects on the relations between Slovaks and members of ethnic groups but also contributed to Slovakia's growing international isolation. While in 1994 Slovakia was in the first group of countries to be invited to join NATO by the time of Mečiar's fall in September 1998 Slovakia's efforts at European and transatlantic integration became unrealistic in the near future.

The Slovak Republic appeared on the map of Europe on January 1, 1993 following the breakup of Czechoslovakia. It has approximately 5,300,000 inhabitants. Slovaks constitute about eighty-six per cent of the overall population, the Hungarian ethnic minority group has more than half million members, forming Slovakia's largest ethnic minority group. The second largest group is the Roma which has about 86,000

¹² There are differences in the terminology used in East Central Europe and that used in anglophone countries. Nationality in Slovak corresponds to the English ethnicity and the Slovak citizenship equals the English nationality. In order to avoid confusion I have decided to use the English terminology.

members followed by approximately 58,000 Czechs and other minority groups including Russians, Ruthenians, Germans and Poles.

Since Slovakia was constituted as an independent country relatively recently the ways in which Slovak statehood and nationhood are constructed and imagined are reflected in political, legislative, social as well as cultural spheres in a striking manner. The impacts of independent nationhood are profound because of the officially promoted and sponsored, programmatic construction of the sense of a unified Slovak nation. This intentional construction of the Slovak national identity has had serious consequences for the minorities living in the territory of the Slovak Republic. The Slovak government authorised restrictions relating to the conduct of minorities, for example in the areas of language use and education, but equally significantly the omission of ethnic minorities from the officially constructed Slovak nation has led to polarisation in the society and serious drawbacks in Slovakia's relations with the international community at large.

The major period of systematic construction of the (independent) Slovak nation occurred under the government led by Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar that was in power until November 1998. Since then a coalition of four parties formed a "new" government with clear attempts at restoring democracy. The government coalition includes a Hungarian party, a very significant step away from the nationalistic and undemocratic tendencies that prevailed during the past five years. In fact, Hungarians currently have ten per cent of the seats in the Slovak National Council (Parliament) which accidentally corresponds to their proportion in the overall population. Despite the claim that the fall of Mečiar's government marks the end of open nationalism in Slovak politics, it will take a long time to bring about changes in the legislation and even more importantly in the overall mood and attitudes to representations of the nation. The election results show that Mečiar's beliefs and political practices are not yet the

thing of the past as his party, The Movement for Democratic Slovakia, effectively won the elections (only by 0.6 per cent of the votes) but was unable to form a majority government.

After gaining independence in 1993 the Slovak government was seen as embodying the interests and nature of the independent Slovak Republic. This perception, purposefully promoted by the politicians involved, was especially powerful since the politicians who were instrumental in the breakup of Czechoslovakia were freely elected after the fall of communism in 1989. At the time it seemed that the breakup of Czechoslovakia was "arranged" between leading politicians on the Czech and Slovak side, the two most influential being Václav Klaus and Vladimír Mečiar and despite popular demands a referendum was never held regarding this question. A number of writers on Czech -Slovak relations (Musil 1995) argue that it was no longer possible to hold the two countries together under the circumstances that occurred in the 1990's. Yet in the popular imagination the prevalent notion is that had there been a referendum, the breakup would not have happened. The appeal of Slovak nationalism is characteristic of the period before the breakup of Czechoslovakia. To illustrate this point about nationalism appearing to represent national interests best, a question to which I return later, let me point out that the Slovak National Party which was founded in March 1990 received in the June elections of the same year fourteen per cent of the votes and thus became the third strongest party in the Slovak National Council.¹³

It became evident during 1991 that the Slovak political representation was actively seeking independence from the Czech Republic. They presented independence

¹³ After the November 1998 elections the Slovak National Party lost its "leading" position, currently it is the sixth strongest party in the Slovak National Council. The party's anti-Hungarian rhetoric has gained a new momentum when the Hungarian Coalition Party was included in the coalition government that came into power after the elections.

as something the Slovaks have fought for for centuries yet were never as successful as the neighbouring countries (Hungary and Poland, for example) whose fight for national independence was more effective already in the 19th century. Even the Czech Lands, although they were part of Czechoslovakia, were presented as preserving their independence (in other words not making concessions to the Slovak party) and abusing Slovakia's resources. The speech delivered by Ivan Gašparovič, the Chairman of the Slovak National Council after he and the Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar signed the Constitution of the Slovak Republic on September 3, 1992 illustrates how this fight for independence was used. This speech reflects the feelings of certain groups within the Slovak population¹⁴ and became a crucial element in the construction of national identity. An excerpt from Mr. Gašparovič's speech reads: "I have already mentioned that by adopting the Constitution of the Slovak Republic the age-long efforts and desires of the many generations of our nation have to a large extent become a reality and have opened up a new historical era for them" (Chovanec, 1992 : 7, my translation). He dates these efforts back to the 1840's, continues with the Memorandum of the Slovak Nation of 1861, the Memorandum of the Slovak League in the United States of 1914, the Cleveland Agreement of 1915, the Pittsburgh Agreement of 1918 and the calls for autonomy during the first Czechoslovak Republic (1918 - 38). These efforts finally culminated on July 17, 1992 with the Declaration of the Sovereignty of the Slovak Republic. "Such long is the history of our nation's pursuit of emancipation and the efforts to found an independent state" (Chovanec, 1992 : 7; my translation).

The 1840's truly represent a good starting point for thinking about Slovakia's efforts at gaining statehood. It was during the Slovak National Awakening of that

¹⁴ It can be noted here that national minorities were in particular alarmed by the influence that the Slovak National Party exercised. Their fears concerned mainly the

period that the Slovak language was "invented" and codified¹⁵ (until then biblical Czech was used) marking a remarkable albeit not straightforward step to the promotion of national awareness and culture. The reason why I listed the "stages" of the fight for independence as identified by Gašparovič is to point out an obvious example of selectivity. The relatively unknown and certainly not highly influential agreements and memoranda that were cited do not seem in fact so important from the point of view of the fight for independence as the existence of the "independent" Slovak Republic between 1939 and 1944. Two decisive events have shaped the developments in Slovakia before the beginning of the Second World War. First of all, the Munich Agreement signed on November 30, 1938 required that Sudetenland (which formed the southern part of the Czech Lands which were in turn an integral part of Czechoslovakia) be handed over to Germany and the Vienna Award of November 2, 1938 which made it possible for Hungary to annex parts of Slovakia and Transcarpathia. The political leaders of Slovakia were at that time proponents of Christian nationalism, a political movement with an exalted national programme, that was gaining considerable power in Slovakia since the 1920's. It was under the influence of this political force that on March 14, 1939 according to Hitler's will President Tiso declared Slovakia's independence and put the country under the Reich's protection. However, the Christian nationalist regime became so unpopular that the nation effectively raised into arms against its own nation state in August 1944. This explains why Gašparovič would not

possibility of playing the "national card" instead of concentrating on the establishing of democracy. These fears were later fully justified.

¹⁵ In fact the effort at codifying a unified language acceptable for Slovaks living in the different regions of Slovakia ran into difficulties. After unsuccessful attempts Ľudovít Štúr succeeded in codifying Slovak based on a mid-Slovakian dialect. Yet his "version" was also attacked by other major figures of the Slovak National Awakening.

deliberately stress its existence among the phases of the "age-long" fight for independence.¹⁶

This is only one example in which a re-inventing of the past and re-writing of history manifests itself in independent Slovakia. These processes were partly due to the fall of communism yet a re-inventing of past and tradition brings with itself serious implications for the way in which national identities are imagined. As Seamus Heaney, the Nobel prize winner Irish poet writes: "Whatever is given,/ Can always be re-imagined, however four-square,/ Plan-thick, hull-stupid and out of its time/ It happens to be" (1995 : 200). When dealing with the past one enters the realm of myth and mythical reimagination of historical events, especially the failed opportunities for creating a better future. However, one should be careful to make a distinction between history and past. History should, in an ideal case, be an objective account of a nation's past and as Frederick Jameson puts it, "history is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis" (1981:102). He goes on to argue that history can never be objective, we can never get hold of the "real of history" as it is by its nature inaccessible to us except in its textual form but although it is inaccessible, it is at the same time inescapable, "we may be sure that its alienating necessities will not forget us, however much we might prefer to ignore them" (1981: 102).

It can be argued that the selectivity that is characteristic of the re-imagining of Slovakia's past and that manifests itself in the omission of, or spread of misinformation

¹⁶ In 1997 the Slovak National Party decided to commemorate the anniversary of the founding of the Slovak Republic in 1939. The leader of the Slovak National Party characterised President Tiso as a "martyr to the protection of the nation and Catholicism against bolshevism and liberalism". He also said: "I condemn the deportation of 67, 000 Jews from Slovakia but we cannot spit at this state because of that." (as quoted in Mesežnikov, 1998 : 70, my translation) On March 14, 1999 the Slovak National Party

about, minorities has had serious impacts both on the majority of Slovaks and the minorities of Hungarians, Poles, Germans, Czechs, Roma and other ethnic groups that live in Slovakia's territory. An interpretation of Slovakia's past as an account of Others victimising Us (whether it be the Czechs, Hungarians, Jews, Soviets or other groups) and preventing Us from fulfilling the ancient dream of independent statehood perhaps strengthens Slovaks' symbolic identification with their newly constructed nation, promotes national sentiments and the belief in the national cause yet at the same time such representations of past treat some of Slovakia's citizens as if they were a threat to its national identity and territorial integrity.

The massive re-writing and re-constructing of discourses related to statehood and nationhood in the independent Slovak Republic show how important tradition and the past are for the construction of national identity. One of the levels on which national unity and the sense of tradition and past is reflected is the nation's holidays and festivities. With the emergence of the independent Slovak Republic public holidays underwent significant changes. Two things were stressed while creating new public holidays in the Slovak Republic: nation and religious (Catholic) belief. A number of holidays were no longer suitable for the Slovak Republic as they were too closely associated with the common Czechoslovak past, indeed an unwanted connection from the perspective of Slovak nation as the period of Czechoslovak past can be seen as a humiliating one. The inclusion of religious festivals made it possible to feel continuity with the pre-communist era. While the Founding of Czechoslovakia remains a public holiday in the Czech Republic, in Slovakia it was substituted by the Day of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic. The 1st of January became the Day of the

commemorated the 60th anniversary of the founding of the independent Slovak Republic. The commemoration caused a lot of criticism and controversy.

Founding of the Slovak Republic and its pompous celebrations were promoted and sponsored by the Mečiar government.

At the beginning of independent statehood it seemed like ethnic minorities would also be assigned a role in the Slovak nation. In the already mentioned speech Gašparovič also addressed the minorities living in Slovakia.

We in particular address citizens of Hungarian, Ukrainian, Polish and German ethnicity, and also the Roma, who live in the territory of our republics [both Slovak and Czech Republics] so that they by implementing their minority rights and rights guaranteed by the constitution help us build this new statehood, a new co-operation and in it a new and democratic civil society. So that they instead of blowing up misunderstandings and clashes, help us build bridges of mutual understanding and prosperous co-operation within our country and with the neighbouring states (Chovanec, 1992 : 7, my translation).

Despite the proclaimed interest of the government¹⁷ in its minorities and co-operation with neighbouring countries, the supposed encouragement to multiplicity in the "new nationhood" soon turned into the active promotion of a single ethnic group. Moreover, these developments went hand in hand with the implementation of undemocratic political practices. The policies aimed at ethnic minorities and the openly authoritarian political practices polarised the Slovak society; divisions did not only include that of Slovak and non-Slovak but also pro-democracy as opposed to pro-Mečiar and at one point those who opposed the Prime Minister and were Slovaks suddenly became "bad Slovaks" thus further dividing the society.

The main proponent of these undemocratic practices became the Prime Minister.

One of the striking features of Slovak nationalism is the obvious mass identification

¹⁷ The government was created by a coalition of three parties: Mečiar's Movement for Democratic Slovakia; The Slovak National Party and the Union of the Workers of Slovakia. The three parties present themselves as Slovak and as embodying an "essential" quality that the Slovak population can identify with, namely democracy,

with the "Leader".¹⁸ Mečiar was able to sustain his image of the father of the nation, an omniscient father who has to suffer for his nation's independence and whose life is under a constant threat¹⁹ from outside and inside enemies, those for whom Slovakia remained an "unwanted child". Augustín Marián Húška, the Deputy Chairman of the Slovak National Council has in 1996 summarised the situation in this way: "Slovakia is still existing on the edge of a knife as it is an unwanted child which the superpowers would like to see in an orderly sheepfold. In spite of that we will endure and resist" (*Plus 7 Dni*, 52, December 23, 1996, p.11, my translation). Another senior member of Mečiar's cabinet (and a prominent member of the Movement for Democratic Slovakia), Sergej Kozlík in May 1997 commented on the fact that the Slovak government opened its sessions by singing patriotic folk songs in the following way: "In Europe Slovaks represent a new momentum, a new way of seeing things. We are undertaking our journey under extremely difficult circumstances so we should perhaps also maintain a specific behaviour, even the Slovak government" (*SME*, 248(6 a 51), 27.10.98, my translation). Thus it was not only the Slovak nation that was constructed as "unique" but also the undemocratic political practices were presented as "uniquely beneficial" and essential for the Slovak nation.

The unique Slovak way, however, brought Slovakia into international isolation. Although the Prime Minister commented mostly on the integration into the European Union and NATO as a desired move and his government programme also included references to integration, his government's policies were in a sharp contrast to the

nation and work. The government coalition had during 1994 - 98 an overwhelming two-third majority in the Slovak National Council.

¹⁸ Mečiar would once a month meet his supporters in one of the stadiums, Pasienky, in Bratislava. Crowds of people would gather to celebrate him, reminding many of the communist times since "party faithful" were given refreshments and small presents to "commemorate" the event each time they visited these meetings.

proclaimed interest in integration. Moreover, at least two of the three governing parties (the Slovak National Party and the Union of the Workers of Slovakia) were openly opposed to integration. In addition to that the Prime Minister appointed a member of the Slovak National Party and an associate of the Union of the Workers of Slovakia as responsible for Slovakia's integration into the European Union and NATO. The government's interference in a referendum that was to be held in connection with NATO integration and direct presidential elections also suggests the proclaimed interest in integration was not meant seriously.²⁰ Political practices in Slovakia were criticised by European Commissioners, most notably Hans van den Broek, members of the European Parliament, the American Ambassador to Slovakia, Ralph Johnson, the US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, only to mention some of them. The Slovak government's offensive reactions to criticisms from abroad further deepened Slovakia's isolation.

The relations with neighbouring countries also deteriorated significantly. Since I am dealing with the Hungarian minority living in Slovakia, a brief outline of the major difficulties between the two governments needs to be discussed. After some efforts of the Mečiar government at restricting minority language use in Slovakia, the Hungarian government became concerned with the situation of national minorities living in Slovakia and wanted to include some propositions about the Hungarian minority in Slovakia and the Slovak minority in Hungary into the basic bilateral agreement between

¹⁹ Conspiracies to murder him sponsored by a variety of countries were a constant theme of his political career, no evidence has, however, ever been provided.

²⁰ A referendum was to be held on May 23 and 24, 1997. The ballots were to include four questions, three of them regarding NATO integration and the fourth regarding direct presidential elections. A month before the referendum the Minister of Interior was instructed not to distribute ballots with four questions but only with three, leaving out the one relating to direct presidential elections. The opposition parties have asked the inhabitants not to take part in the referendum unless ballots had the original four

the two states. Mainly because of the minority question, the agreement that was signed in 1995 was ratified by the Slovak National Council only a year later and even more importantly the Slovak government did not abide by it. The question of the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros dam on the Danube and the inability of the two sides to arrive at an agreement and the consequent appeal to the International Tribunal in the Hague further deteriorated relations between the two countries. In August 1997 the situation aggravated when the Prime Minister Mečiar suggested to his Hungarian counterpart, Gyula Horn, a voluntary exchange of Slovak Hungarians for Hungarian Slovaks. Horn firmly rejected any similar suggestions nonetheless understandably the event had a significant impact on Hungarians living in Slovakia. The bridge between the Hungarian town Esztergom and the Slovak town of Štúrovo which was bombed during the Second World War was to be rebuilt under the Mečiar government. However, as a symbol of deteriorated neighbouring relations the bridge remains as it has been for the past fifty years.²¹

Mečiar's practices were not restricted to politics though. His government actively intervened in the field of media and used state-controlled television channels for constructing national identity as well as for disseminating his "unique" political beliefs. Yet a number of unexpected developments occurred in Slovakia after the founding of the privately-owned television channel Markíza. I would now like to discuss these developments in the sphere of media.

In 1997 international organisations listed Slovakia among the countries with only partial freedom of press (Füle, 1998: 634). Füle also gives an account of events that can be defined as a restriction of free access to and spread of information. These

questions on them. In the end the referendum was not valid since only ten per cent of the voters took part in it.

include the cancelling of press conferences after government sessions, selection of reporters to attend press conferences given by different ministries, refusal to provide the representatives of privately-owned radio stations and television channels with information from public officials and the 25-hour-disconnection of the frequency of the radio station Twist.

The governing coalition, and especially the Movement for Democratic Slovakia, used its political influence to turn the state-controlled media into its advocates. Because radio and television broadcasting is regulated by the Council for Radio and Television Broadcasting that is elected by the Slovak National Council, in which the governing coalition had a two third majority, since autumn 1994 members of the Council were exclusively associates of the governing coalition. The Slovak Press Agency remained state-controlled and many have suspected that some of the media were owned by members of the Movement for Democratic Slovakia which could not have been proved as in Slovakia owners of media are not obliged to make their names public. The state-controlled television channels STV1 and STV2 were openly used for the purposes of the government coalition.

The news coverage on STV was also in 1997 the tool for the ruling movement's, the Movement for Democratic Slovakia, propaganda. Commentaries attacking political opponents, the head of the state and the countries of the European Union were a part of Noviny STV [major evening news bulletin]. Obvious misinformation was given room, facts were withheld and modified. The Movement for Democratic Slovakia was openly promoted by the editors even to the detriment of its coalition partners (Füle, 1998: 628, my translation).

²¹ In the meantime the "new" Slovak government has agreed with the Hungarian government to rebuild the bridge by the year 2001.

The situation has remarkably changed in 1996, not due to government efforts but because of the establishing of the privately-run Slovak television channel Markíza.²² Markíza is owned by two Slovak citizens (fifty-one per cent) and an American media group, Central European Media Enterprise Group. Markíza has almost immediately become the most watched television channel in Slovakia, already at the end of 1996 its rating was above sixty per cent compared to the state-run STV1's forty per cent (Füle, 1998: 626). At the beginning Markíza presented itself as apolitical but it gradually started "supporting" the political opposition. Until November 1998 Markíza "behaved" as a typical commercial channel in the East Central European region. The majority of its programmes are American; it was only its news coverage under the Mečiar government that made it outstanding among other commercial television channels.²³ Markíza still remains the most popular television channel in Slovakia.

Cable and satellite television have also spread quickly in Slovakia. While in 1988 there were only three networks of cable television, currently there are over one hundred and twenty of them and they cover about twenty-eight per cent of the Slovak households. If we add individual or shared satellite receivers the proportion of households that have access to satellite television programmes jumps into seventy-five per cent (Füle, 1998: 630).

²² In the meantime interviews with Markíza's director Pavol Rusko made it clear that the government had given licence to Markíza as it was to become controlled by forces loyal to the government. The forces, however, turned disloyal and when the government tried to effectively shut down the television channel, demonstrations broke out. The same conclusion was drawn by the Slovak National Council's Committee on Security Issues that reviewed the activities of the Slovak Information Service during the period between 1994-98. SIS clearly abused state-run media for propaganda purposes and a campaign aimed at discrediting politicians from opposition parties and created plans for "overtaking" Markíza.

²³ Markíza's news coverage was of a quality unlike other commercial channels until September 1998 when the elections were won by the opposition and the news coverage on STV became significantly closer to impartiality. This is an illustrative example of how a single television channel can take up different functions within the public sphere.

In order to understand the developments regarding the situation of ethnic minorities in Slovakia during the past five years I would like to return briefly to the re-composing and re-defining of boundaries of the national and minority cultures since these undoubtedly played a key role in those developments. In Slovakia the redefining of these boundaries did not only happen on a symbolic level but also on a geographical one. The shifting of borders went on for centuries. The changes that followed after the First World War have significantly influenced relations between Slovaks and Hungarians. After the end of the First World War the spirit of the age (most notably the assumed right of nations to self-determination) and the prevailing geopolitical situation made it possible to found Czechoslovakia. The borders of the area which is today southern Slovakia were determined by the Treaty of Trianon of June 1920 and as a result of this division more than half a million ethnic Hungarians found themselves part of Czechoslovakia. In 1938, however, the territory inhabited by Slovak Hungarians was, due to the Viennese Award, annexed to Hungary together with its original population. Only about ten per cent of the original Hungarian minority group remained in Slovakia. After the Second World War the territory was handed back to Czechoslovakia. Despite that the re-territorisation did not end for Slovak Hungarians since a systematic process of national purification began. Germans were deported from the Czech Lands and under the pretext of betrayal (since Slovak Hungarians found themselves part of fascist Hungary because of the Viennese Award) attempts had been made at the removal of all members (more than 630,000 in 1937 before the annexation) of the Hungarian minority group. Indeed between 1945 and 1948 Slovak Hungarians were deprived of their Czechoslovak citizenship which had a number of very grave implications, among them no right to vote and no education in Hungarian. In the end about 200,000 Slovak Hungarians were subjected to a partially voluntary exchange of

inhabitants with Hungary, further 44, 000 were deported to the Czech Lands to work in agriculture and many more have been "re-slovakised".²⁴ It is clearly the case that these historical events exercise an influence on popular imagination even today. Moreover, this re-composing of boundaries has serious implications for the relationships among state, nation and ethnic minorities which I discuss in the next chapter.

The effects of the active government-sponsored creation of homogeneous Slovak national identity demonstrate themselves in the lives of ethnic minorities on a number of different levels. Some of these have been discussed already, I would, however, like to discuss five areas in particular: language laws, education, institutions (political and cultural ones) and also political manifestations of ethnic hatred and attitudes to the Hungarian minority. These spheres may all have a significant impact on language choice made by bilingual Hungarians in southern Slovakia. During 1993 and 1994 due to pressure from abroad, laws were passed that have increased the possibility to use minority languages. These included the law regulating the use of names and surnames, making it possible for members of minority groups to use their names in their original form and the so-called "sign law" which allows the use of signs denoting the names of settlements in the language of the minority in settlements where the proportion of the inhabitants belonging to a national minority is at least twenty per cent (Dostál 1998 and de Varennes 1996). Since 1995 the government policies implemented in the field of minority conduct were of an openly confrontational nature. The so-called "language law" (the law regulating the use of the official language) was passed in 1995. It has

²⁴ Re-slovakisation was a government scheme that was aimed at assimilating the Hungarian minority. In this process Hungarians who could prove their Slovak ancestry were to become Slovaks again and their citizenship was restored. Despite the rather attractive perspective of regaining citizenship the program was not as successful as the government assumed. It has to be noted here that because of the geopolitical changes during the past few hundred years attempts at magyarisation (the often involuntary turning of Slovaks into Hungarians) and slovakisation were a regular feature.

restricted the use of minority languages in certain areas. Dostál (1998) argues that the most serious insufficiency of this law is the lack of regulation of minority language conduct that would guarantee the right of minorities to use their languages in official conduct which is granted to them by the *Constitution of the Slovak Republic*. The problem arose when the insufficient "language law" came into power and the law that regulated the use of minority languages in public conduct dating back to 1990 was annulled. Dostál points out that

minorities have the right to use their languages in private and public, in the media, in education, in cultural conduct, in courts and in criminal proceedings, in a settlement's chronicle, on public signs, they [the minorities] have the right for the use and official recognition of their names and surnames in their mother tongues, as well as for the denoting of settlements in the language of the minority where it consists at least 20 per cent of the inhabitants. On the other hand the legislation of the Slovak Republic in fact makes it impossible to use minority languages in official conduct, that is in the citizen's dealing with the state administration, local administrative bodies and public institutions. The legislation does not make it possible to write street names and other topographic names in the minority languages. ... The law on the official language partially restricts the use of minority languages in the fields of media, culture, education, public signs and denominations. The law on official language without reason restricts the right to use minority languages in the contact between medical professionals and patients (Dostál, 1998 :159, my translation).

The insufficiencies of the language law can be a serious threat to the maintaining of minority languages and also have as a direct result divisions within the society.

In the sphere of education the policies of the Mečiar government were aimed at eradicating the use of minority languages. The Hungarian and Ukrainian minorities have kindergartens and primary schools with teaching in their mother tongues. In addition, there are also secondary schools available for the Hungarian minority. Teaching in these schools is provided in the minority languages with compulsory classes of Slovak language. During the 1993/94 school year at some schools the teaching of German as mother tongue began. There are private as well as public schools, teaching in

some minority languages is available in both. In 1996 the government coalition prepared a new law on education. One of its proposals was to make it compulsory to teach Slovak, geography, history and physical education in Slovak in the minority schools. After the first reading in the Slovak National Council the bill was returned for further elaboration but not because of the proposed change in education in minority languages.

Another blow to education in minority languages came in January 1997 when the government made it unlawful for schools to issue transcripts in two languages, a practice that had been in effect since 1921. These events were fiercely condemned not only by the minority population (especially by Hungarians and Ukrainians since education in minority languages is mainly available to them) but also by the Slovak opposition parties and the Hungarian government. Demonstrations and protests followed, and some schools nonetheless issued bilingual certificates and as a consequence in some cases the salaries of the teachers were lowered and principals dismissed. The issuing of certificates in two languages was renewed after the "new" government came into power in November 1998 and in January 1999 the mid-term transcripts were already issued in two languages.

Another "attack" on education in minority languages came at the beginning of 1998 when the Slovak National Party proposed a law that would eradicate teaching in minority languages as it has been practised until then and would substitute it by bilingual education. The government did not last long enough to pass this law.

In terms of institutions the government established the Council of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Nationalities. This body was however only advisory and its recommendations were not binding for the government. There are no local government mechanisms that would ensure the rights of minorities and minorities

have no right to be represented in the Slovak National Council. Only three minorities have political parties: the Roma, the Hungarian and the Ruthenian.

Regarding cultural institutions the government runs four professional national minority theatres, two Hungarian ones, a Roma and a Ukrainian. There are also museums of national minority heritage which are either separate institutions or are parts of other museums. The state-controlled television channels and radio stations have programmes in minority languages that take the form of news bulletins from different regions of Slovakia where members of ethnic minorities reside. Cultural associations of national minorities and the publishing in minority languages are outside state control. These areas are, however, subsidised by the government but as Dostál (1998) points out the Mečiar government significantly reduced, approximately by two thirds, the amount of financial assistance to minority cultures. The case of the Hungarian cultural association CSEMADOK is in many ways a telling one. While in 1994 CSEMADOK received a subsidy of 10.8 million Slovak crowns, in 1995 it was only 4.11 million, in 1996 the association received no subsidy and in 1997 it was only 200, 000 Slovak crowns.

Political demonstrations of hatred against ethnic minorities may indirectly and directly affect not only choices made by ethnic minorities but also relations between minority and majority populations. For this reason, I believe, they should be given due attention, especially as the undemocratic conduct of the Mečiar government made it impossible to even question politicians who made statements that would in democratic societies pass as instances of ethnic and racial hatred. This is, however, not surprising if one recalls Prime Minister Mečiar's 1997 suggestion to the Hungarian Prime Minister Horn about the voluntary exchange of inhabitants; yet the rhetoric of the Slovak National Party was by far the most outrageous. As Mesežnikov points out, the Slovak

National Party can be characterised by "its extreme nationalistic character, including strong anti-Hungarian rhetoric, references to the negative historical experiences of Slovaks and Hungarians, the creation of the feeling that the Slovak population is threatened by the supposed irredentist efforts of Hungary and Hungarian politicians in the south of Slovakia" (1998: 69). According to the Slovak National Party the Hungarian national minority has enjoyed rights that were beyond standard ones. The peak of nationalistic propaganda came in September 1997 when the leader of the Slovak National Party Ján Slota proclaimed that "Hungarians were the misfortune of Europe" and that this misfortune consisted in the settlement of "barbaric nomadic tribes that called themselves Huns" who "were weak soldiers but they were very cruel and merciless. They slaughtered young children, ripped the bellies of pregnant women. And these people settled down in the centre of Europe. That is a misfortune. Not Trianon. Trianon is not a misfortune at all. Hungarians are the misfortune of Europe". He went on to argue that "national minorities are the tool of cosmopolitans so that they can create war conflict and through these conflicts destroy nations" (as quoted in Dostál, 1998: 168, my translation).

The overall attitude of the Mečiar government, and especially of the Slovak National Party, suggests not only legislative and political attempts at significant restriction of minority rights but also efforts at polarising the Slovak society. Slovakia's Hungarian minority has perceived the impacts of the practices of the Mečiar government very strongly. Zora Bútorová (1998) points out a sharp contrast in the understanding of the government's policies regarding ethnic minorities between Slovaks and Hungarians. In an opinion poll carried out by the non-governmental Inštitút pre verejné otázky (Institute for Public Matters) in 1997 respondents were asked to characterise the Slovak government's minority policies by one of the four characteristics: confrontational,

correct, too benevolent, do not know. Thirty per cent of the Slovak respondents as compared to ninety-two per cent of the Hungarian ones agreed with confrontational, thirty-eight per cent of the Slovak respondents agreed with correct compared to five per cent of Hungarian respondents, fifteen per cent of the Slovak respondents felt the government was too benevolent compared with one per cent of the Hungarian respondents and seventeen per cent and two per cent respectively chose do not know.

In this chapter I have argued that the construction of national identity in the independent Slovak republic has had significant impacts on its minority population. The processes in which the nation came to be imagined were largely politicised and an identification with the Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar made the separation of political and national a great difficulty. The Prime Minister and the leader of the Slovak National Party were able to maintain their image of "protectors of the nation" to a large extent due to their nationalistic attitudes. The way in which national identity was constructed had as its consequence the effective halt of efforts at integration into The European Union and NATO and led to Slovakia's isolation and a deterioration in its relations with neighbouring countries. The process of national "unification" has also had a direct impact on policies regarding national minorities. Major changes were implemented in minority language use and partly as a direct consequence of restrictions on minority language use, other areas of the lives of national minorities have been affected. The current Slovak government is trying to bring the legislation on minority issues closer to "Western" standards. The position of a Deputy Chairman of the Slovak Government for Human Rights and Minority Issues²⁵ was established and a member of the SMK (Hungarian Coalition Party) was appointed to it. The government proclaimed

²⁵ It has already proved to be the case that most problematic issues concern the rights of Roma ethnic group.

that a bill regulating minority language use in official conduct would be ready for the first reading in the Slovak National Council in April 1999 and Slovakia will soon also have its first ombudsman or ombudswoman. However, as perceptions of policies regarding minorities suggest, public opinion in Slovakia also needs to undergo significant changes in addition to policies so that national minorities may begin feeling as welcome citizens of the Slovak Republic.

CHAPTER III

SOCIALISATION AND CULTURAL ACCOMMODATION

National identity is not stable and given, it is a construct that can be actively and intentionally "built", as the case of Slovakia clearly demonstrates. Yet, national identity seems to have an immediacy and reality for individual members of a nation and indeed individual citizens of nation states. This quality of "realness" that is associated with national identity can be attributed to the fact that each individual is from an early childhood socialised into it.

Identities are, however, not constructed only on the national level; cultural and social levels are also involved in the process. It may seem artificial to divide the second level into culture and society. Yet, I understand culture as more embedded than society and moreover I believe this distinction helps in analysing identities of different cultural groups living in the same society. Social agents, nonetheless, play a leading role in both socialisation and enculturation.

The concept of socialisation refers to "the process whereby people acquire the rules of behaviour and the systems of beliefs and attitudes that equip a person to function effectively as a member of society" (Durkin, 1996: 48). I understand the process of socialisation as involving the acquisition of national identity. In other words, being a member of a nation can seem to be determined by "objective" factors such as place of birth yet one "learns" to be a member of a nation rather than passively assuming that status. Socialisation is accompanied by the process of enculturation into the individual's cultural group. One is born into a cultural group but one needs to "learn" being its part. Both these processes begin in early childhood and social agents, such as family, school, clergy and media, play an important role in the "learning" of national identity and cultural belonging.

In the context of East Central Europe the processes of socialisation and enculturation involve a duality and complexity especially for members of minority groups and influence both majority and minority groups. Members of ethnic minorities are socialised into a national identity that is often constructed in such a way as to deny, or disguise, the participation of ethnic minorities in its creation and maintenance. Nations that are imagined and constructed in such a way, however, make attempts, including forced assimilation, at securing minorities' "loyalty" to the state. This is further complicated by the fact that in the East Central European region state is perceived as equalling nation (Barša 1998). At the same time and because of the same reason, the way in which members of ethnic minorities can identify with the state is through the national identity that they have been denied. There is yet another added aspect to the already complex relationship between nation, state and minorities and that is the fact that ethnic minorities tend to inhabit border regions. They thus belong to one state as its citizens yet culturally associate themselves with a neighbouring state.

This duality is often perceived as threatening by nation states due to the assumption that cultural belonging is somehow more important to minorities than citizenship. In a paradoxical way states in their regulations of minority conduct enforce this assumption when they restrict access to minority cultures in their own territory which in turn increases their attempts at accessing culture in the "mother tongue countries". In many East Central European countries the sense of a homogeneous national identity is perceived as the only possible option and there is strong resistance to "opening up" the concept to multiplicity which would, among other things, effectively diminish the perceived threat of minority groups' disloyalty (Barša 1998).

To explain the complexities of socialisation and enculturation I use the concept of cultural transmission in the East Central European region. Cultural transmission is a

complex process happening on a number of levels. Instead of discussing its whole complexity I would like to turn those aspects relevant to my study: acculturation, ethnic relations and language maintenance. Cultural transmission does not lead to the replication of successive generations; rather it falls between an exact transmission and its complete failure. Cultural transmission occurs on three inter-related levels. On the vertical level it involves general enculturation from parents and specific socialisation from parents (child rearing), on the horizontal level it is general enculturation from peers and specific socialisation from peers. In addition to these two levels there is oblique transmission from one's own group in the form of general enculturation and specific socialisation and from other groups in the form of general acculturation and specific resocialisation (Berry et al., 1992 :110).

In the context of East Central Europe I find it justified to adjust the concept of cultural transmission and simplify it slightly. Socialisation and enculturation go hand in hand for each ethnic group that occupies the territory of a state. While members of the dominant ethnic group that understands itself as a homogeneous nation are socialised into national identity and enculturated into national culture, members of ethnic minority groups go through a more complex process. On the one hand they are socialised into national identity as a prerequisite of their citizenship and into ethnic identity; on the other hand they also go through the process of enculturation into ethnic culture and to a certain extent also national culture. Enculturation into national culture is similarly contradictory as socialisation into national identity. National culture is constructed in opposition to ethnic cultures and yet some of its aspects must be "learned" by members of minorities as they provide a link to citizenship.²⁶

²⁶ An obvious example is the national anthem. In terms of language and music it often reflects the majority's cultural traditions yet it has a role in state affairs.

The concept of acculturation provides a theoretical framework in which to think about interactions among ethnic groups that co-exist in a society. Herskovits and Redfield developed the concept of acculturation to account for phenomena that occur when groups of individuals with different cultural backgrounds come into continuous first-hand contact that leads to changes in the original cultures of one or all groups concerned (Berry et al., 1992: 271). Acculturation takes place on an individual as well as a collective level. Berry et al. (1992) distinguish four varieties of acculturation: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation. This categorisation is based on attitudes to two basic issues. The first one is whether it is considered valuable to maintain cultural identity and characteristics and secondly whether it is considered to be an asset to maintain relationships with other groups.

It is equally important to distinguish who is making the decision about the course of acculturation. Integration implies that both groups (the dominant and the acculturating one²⁷) feel positive about the two above mentioned statements. Marginalisation implies little voluntariness on the part of the acculturating group, while separation is decided by the acculturating group while segregation is imposed on the acculturating group by the dominant one. Assimilation can either stem from the acculturating group's voluntary decision or can be a result of pressure from the dominant group. The emergence of multicultural philosophy and policies in the 1980's have led to an increased interest in integration as the only possibility for a successful co-existence of ethnic groups within multicultural societies.²⁸

²⁷ I take into account the simplest possible example when acculturation concerns only one acculturating group and one dominant group. Obviously with the increasing number of acculturating groups and the possibility of more than one dominant group living in the same state the process becomes more complex.

Acculturation, as a term and concept, does not exactly reflect the realities of "cultural interactions" in the East Central European region. Acculturation can be usefully applied in the cases of "immigration" countries where some ethnic groups can be understood as "domestic" ones while others, newcomers, are expected to acculturate and resocialise so that they can become integrated within a state. The case of East Central Europe is radically different. Ethnic groups that live in its territory are not in the majority of cases newcomers; rather they have lived on those territories in many cases for centuries and are normally not expected to acculturate and resocialise. Changes in cultural interactions and in the composition of nation states in contemporary East Central Europe are due to migration in a minimum of cases. More often they are due to shifts of borders that went on for decades and are in some areas still going on. Due to long-term co-existence of ethnic groups, minorities have already been integrated within the society they live in, so rather than to acculturate, minority ethnic groups in East Central Europe are expected to accommodate their cultures and identities so that those fit with the practices and visions of nation states. For majorities and minorities such cultural accommodation involves the contestation of the complex duality in which relations among nation, state and minorities are reflected.

The form that acculturation, in the case of East Central Europe cultural accommodation, takes and the attitudes of the groups concerned are fundamental in determining relations among ethnic groups. Berry et al. (1992) analyse possible contributions of cross-cultural psychology to the understanding of three areas within ethnic relations: stereotypes, attitudes and discrimination. These three areas have special resonance in the East Central European region where many countries have not

²⁸ It is not my aim here to discuss different criticisms of multiculturalism. It has been suggested that multiculturalism in a sense resembles positive discrimination whereas

yet adopted legal and other frameworks to counter and prevent negative stereotyping and racial and ethnic discrimination.

Berry et al. argue that stereotypes as cognitive categories are needed to bring order to diversity so that "individuals, in order to keep track of the numerous groups around them, may develop and share these generalizations as a normal psychological process. These acts of categorization are in essence benign; the difficulty lies with the overgeneralizations and the often negative evaluations (attitudes and prejudices) that are directed toward members of the categories" (1992 : 299). Their claim that there are "socially desirable" aspects of stereotyping that make mutual attraction between groups possible although the groups maintain their ethnic distinctiveness may possibly apply to countries with established democracies and multicultural policies yet they definitely do not reflect the situation in the East Central European region. In some of the countries negative stereotyping and extreme solutions regarding the problems connected with ethnic and racial minorities do not only enter the political realm but are actually implemented.²⁹

The major question in relation to Berry et al.'s argument is, in fact, how stereotypes are reflected in attitudes to ethnic groups and how stereotypes and attitudes are reflected in the form of discrimination against ethnic and racial minorities. It can be argued that attitudes may be relatively independent of ethnic stereotypes, as Berry et al. do, supporting their argument by a study (Gardner, Wonnacott and Taylor 1968) that has shown that the degree of stereotyping of an ethnic group is unrelated to the evaluation of

members of minorities are "marked" and "assigned" their places in the society (Hasselbach 1998).

²⁹ Such attempts mainly concern the Roma minority since in many East Central European countries this minority group is understood as the only significant racial minority.

that group. At the same time, however, they acknowledge consistent ethnocentrism in attitudes. In other words, "own" group ratings tend to be higher than "other" group ones (Berry and Kalin 1979).

The problem with studies in cross-cultural psychology is, as for example Berry et al. acknowledge, that they involve only particular cultures and societies. Such studies on East Central Europe are missing. Thus one needs to use other sources when assessing cultural interactions and the impact of stereotypes and attitudes as I do in the case of Slovakia in the next chapter.

An important influence on ethnic relations in a state can be the length of co-existence of ethnic groups and the already discussed urge to create the sense of a homogeneous nation. "In new nation-states identity shifts tend to be away from small-scale or local cultural identities toward larger nationwide identities" (Berry et al., 1992 :304). In the majority of East Central European countries ethnic groups have co-existed for centuries. Yet, the shifts of borders and the creation of new nation states created a situation in which national identities are brought to the centre of attention. The complexity of these processes is demonstrated also by the different forms in which new states emerged after the fall of communism; these cover a continuum between separatism (the case of Czechoslovakia) and unification (the case of the former Germanys).

I have argued that language is a key aspect of culture; it is thus not surprising that it is a central issue in acculturation and cultural accommodation. Language attitudes and behaviours are varied, research on them suggests "the relatively strong (but variable) support in attitudes toward maintenance (exhibiting both individual and group differences) and second the discrepancy between attitudes and actual language behavior" (Berry et al., 1992: 305). I have already demonstrated that one of the major factors in

language maintenance is the attitude of others in the society, especially members of the dominant ethnic group/s. This can explain the discrepancy between attitudes and actual behaviour as language preference does not necessarily become language practice due to restrictions imposed by individuals and institutions in the society. Despite that, Berry et al. (1992) use Gardner's argument that language learning motives are more important than aptitudes. Such motives for the acquisition of second language include: instrumental (those that will guarantee advancement, e.g. in occupational terms) and integrative (these stem from the desire to learn more about the group and possibly "acquire" its culture) ones. Societies that support multiculturalism would thus encourage both types of motives and create possibilities for maintaining bi/tri or multilingualism. Such categorisation may be useful in multicultural societies yet it raises scepticism when taking into account the realities of the East Central European region where outbreaks of nationalism are concentrated around language issues disregarding motives as well as aptitudes.

Bilingualism has been widely studied in "immigration" countries (e.g. Canada) especially because it may be a tool for the integration of ethnic minorities into the society at large. Bilingualism has also been studied for its effects on cognitive skills and research on it has gone through different phases ranging from claims that bilingualism has negative effects on intelligence through neutral to positive effects (Edwards, 1994, Grosjean, 1982). Studies on bilingualism indicate that it may enhance certain cognitive skills; Berry et al. (1992) claim that bilingual children appear to be advanced in cognitive flexibility, divergent thinking and creativity.

In countries with established democracies and multicultural policies bilingualism becomes to a large extent a matter of choice. In such cases states rarely actively interfere in their inhabitants' language maintenance, moreover they tend to provide

means for maintaining cultural and language multiplicity, even actively encouraging it. It is especially important to maintain what is termed additive (in this case the acquiring of a second language does not have effects on the mother tongue) as opposed to subtractive (the learning of a second language leads to a loss of the mother tongue due for example, to national linguistic or educational policies) form of bilingualism.³⁰

It is not surprising that bilingualism is rarely considered an asset in East Central Europe since language is understood as a core aspect of national identity in which, supposedly, there is no multiplicity. Minorities make special effort to secure as much control over issues regarding education and publishing in minority languages because many states in East Central Europe interfere in these matters in a severely restrictive way. Bilingualism has a number of implications for the individual, and in certain cases the use of a language other than the official one can be considered unacceptable and ground for discrimination.

Having discussed some of the complexities of living in multiethnic states in the East Central European region I would now like to turn to agents of socialisation that are to a large degree "responsible" for the acquisition of identities. Arguably, the influence of family and school in socialisation and enculturation is particularly strong in childhood. In terms of family structure socialisation and enculturation in East Central Europe share basic characteristics with those in Western countries as the majority of children are brought up in nuclear families. However, when discussing national and ethnic identities one needs to take into account that some children are socialised and enculturated in bilingual or biethnic families a fact that has serious implications for

³⁰ Issues like these have been widely studied in western societies yet as Berry et al. (1992) argue research on bilingualism needs to move to other parts of the world as well.

choices that parents have to make at an early stage in a child's life. These choices regard both socialisation and enculturation. It is not only whether to teach a child both languages but also what culture should a child be enculturated into and what school should a child be sent to, to name the most important ones. Family dynamics, power relations, degree of identification with the cultural group one belongs to, all play an important role in decision making. Needless to say that probably due to the understanding of ethnic minorities that prevailed under communism the exploration of these issues has been grossly underdeveloped.

In the East Central European region the legacy of communism needs to be taken into account when discussing children's socialisation within the family context. After the fall of communism a radically new environment was created in which children are socialised. A class system (that was officially non-existent under communism) brought with itself new realities together with ideological changes, free market economy and consumerism. Although the large majority of children attending primary schools in Slovakia have no experience and memories of communism³¹ their parents' lives have not been untouched by the previous "regime". Parents' understanding of the changes following the Velvet Revolution of 1989 are likely to influence their perceptions of children's socialisation and enculturation, not least in terms of the role of other agents of socialisation (for example church). In terms of certain choices regarding children's socialisation there is seemingly not much change if compared to the communist era. An example can be education in minority languages since it has been available also during the communist era; however the geopolitical changes that followed the fall of communism may have an impact on parents' choice of the language of schooling.

The communist regimes that existed in the East Central European region up until the late 1980's did not show much interest in the study of bilingualism.

³¹ The same in fact applies to the existence of Czechoslovakia.

The choice of school is indeed a complex matter. There is no "multicultural" type of education available in East Central Europe that would emphasise intercultural knowledge and competence and introduce students to a variety of cultures and stress how to live with cultural difference. Minority schools are available, both state- and privately-run, and they constitute a separate category within educational systems. Selecting a "majority" or minority school involves a number of consequences. First of all, children are taught a language and educated in a language. In a majority school a child belonging to an ethnic minority acquires no formal knowledge of a minority language; on the other hand in a minority school the majority language is taught as a foreign language and the success of such teaching depends to a large extent on the methodology used and the exposure to the majority language outside school. In a majority school a child is enculturated into the majority culture while minority cultures are ignored. In a minority school a child is enculturated into the culture of his/her ethnic group with some aspects of the majority culture. Socialisation in terms of national identity understandably differs in the two types of schools. There is another factor that I consider very important and that is the fact that children attending a minority school do not encounter members of other cultural groups in the educational process.³²

If we take into account formal aspects of bilingual education, a distinction can be made between a transitional and maintenance type of bilingual education. In the transitional type both the mother tongue and second language are used in education; however the aim is for the second language to phase out and replace the mother tongue once functional competence is achieved. The maintenance type of bilingual education on the other hand stresses the development of fluency in the language of the dominant

³² At least in Slovakia teachers in minority schools usually belong to the given ethnic minority group.

society without diminishing competence in the mother tongue. A third type of education available in some bilingual areas is the immersion type of programmes when children are immediately educated in second language only without prior knowledge of it. This type has been successful in Canada but it has to be pointed out that studies suggest that it is more the specific socio-political context than the method itself that made the immersion type of programmes successful.

In the majority of states of East Central Europe education in minority language is not available to all minority groups; the size of a minority group is usually determining in this respect. Moreover, it is usually one type of language teaching that is available which in the case of minority schools involves teaching the minority language as the mother tongue and the majority language as a foreign language. In addition to that, it seems that the majority of nation states find it difficult to give power to minorities over certain crucial issues such as education and thus policies in this sphere remain largely assimilative. Tosi argues that despite the prevalence of the multicultural philosophy in educational policies of the countries of the European Union since the 1980's

native fluency in languages other than the school language is widely regarded as educationally undesirable. The same old argument is made that it might impair the bilingual child's learning of the national language, but what is not always admitted is that it presents novel difficulties for monolingual schools. ... In the past; the curriculum could afford to ignore any language competence which was not the national language. Today the current multicultural approach claims to provide bilingual children with the best educational opportunities. But these can hardly be found in those schools which teach only foreign languages. These are also schools that have begun to teach migrant or community languages, but their courses, too, offer little support to bilingualism when they adopt a foreign language approach. This is because the syllabus and examinations adopted by national systems of education are based on assumptions relevant to the learning process typical of those who are monolingual native speakers of the national language (Tosi, 1991: 29).

The same applies to the countries of the East Central European region. It is not only the specific ways in which national identity is imagined that restrain cultural plurality but also the ignorance of or apparent unwillingness to incorporate new methods of teaching and new forms of bilingual education. The current methods of teaching minority and majority languages may prevent some students from further studies that involve being taught in the majority language only.

Apart from school other institutions that play an important role in socialisation and enculturation include church and media. Religious affiliation in itself can be a very significant element of ethnic culture. In some cases the religious group with which an ethnic minority is associated can in itself be a major factor that differentiates it from the dominant group/s in the society. If religious affiliation is understood as a constitutive part of national identity and national identity is constructed as homogeneous in this respect, socialisation of minorities into national identity is made even more complicated. It is not only that identification with nation is further complicated but more importantly that active and targeted attempts can be made at "eradicating" certain religious denominations. It is enough to think of Islam in Russia, and these identifications can contribute to military conflict, as the experience of the Balkans shows.

Cultural institutions play a primary role in the "dissemination" of national culture and identity; the same applies to the case of ethnic minorities, they need cultural institutions to maintain their cultures and identities and to socialise and enculturate new members into them. Thus if state-run cultural institutions exclusively maintain "homogeneous" national culture disregarding ethnic minorities, assimilation of minorities into the dominant culture and identity can become more imminent.

Obviously, geographical closeness of the mother tongue country and free entry into it can help maintaining ethnic identity and culture at least to a limited extent despite

government efforts at assimilation. Among cultural institutions media play a very important role in maintaining culture since they are relatively widespread and access to them is easier than to theatres, museums etc. Media play a role not only in "spreading" culture but also in the attitudes that are shown toward members of minorities since in cases where first-hand contact between the majority group and minorities does not occur media act as a source of information (and possibly misinformation whether intentional or not is a different matter) about minorities.

The above mentioned agents of socialisation provide examples that demonstrate that choices made over socialisation and enculturation in childhood have long-term effects. These effects demonstrate themselves not only in terms of contesting identities and a duality of "belonging" but also in social mobility, personal interactions, attitudes to cultural groups that live in the territory of the state of which one is a citizen and also in attitudes to the state itself. Interactions among cultural groups play an important role in eradicating negative stereotypes and attitudes and subsequently can be an influential tool in eradicating prejudices and ethnic and racial discrimination. However, since in East Central Europe such interactions are "regulated" in the context of nation states this has serious implications for the possibility of creating truly multicultural societies. Furthermore in many cases legal and institutional frameworks that would counter prejudices and "protect" citizens belonging to various cultural groups are missing.

The duality that is experienced by members of minority groups in East Central Europe should not, in my opinion, be understood primarily as a perhaps striking and "fascinating" aspect of identity in the post-modern world since this duality has many real-life implications and consequences as I demonstrate in the case of Slovakia in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

CHILDREN'S SOCIALISATION AND CULTURAL ACCOMMODATION IN SOUTHERN SLOVAKIA

Because socialisation and cultural accommodation begin in early childhood and have subsequent impact on an individual throughout his/her life I explore the choices and duality in which these processes occur in the largely bilingual area of southern Slovakia that is a part of a newly created nation state whose government actively constructed Slovak national identity as homogeneous and stable. My focus in this chapter lies in an exploration of concrete circumstances in southern Slovakia that are constitutive in the processes of children's socialisation and enculturation. I concentrate on the impact of the particular construction of Slovak national identity on bilingual (in some cases biethnic) Hungarians living in the region and the possible impact of restrictive policies on Hungarian children's socialisation and enculturation in the family and educational context. In addition to that I consider Slovaks' attitudes and perceptions of Hungarians.

The region of southern Slovakia has been inhabited by Hungarians for centuries and it underwent numerous changes regarding its territorial status. The frequent shifts of borders, most recently in 1993 following the breakup of Czechoslovakia, although those changes did not affect southern Slovakia, created a unique situation in which identities are contested. The ethnic divisions that exist in Slovakia are the legacy of the post-First World War period when new states were created after the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. The territorial divisions that were implemented after the signing of the Treaty of Trianon divided ethnic communities in some cases in an

arbitrary manner. These divisions, as I have already argued, bear significance even nowadays.

In addition to the frequent shifts of borders, one also needs to take into account that Slovakia, and previously Czechoslovakia, is not an "immigration" country. Barša (1998) argues that one of the major reasons for xenophobia and an insecurity in terms of perceived threats aimed at the "unified" and "homogeneous" Czech national identity are partly due to the fact that the Austro-Hungarian monarchy had no overseas colonies (thus cultural contact occurred only with known ethnic groups) and that the Czech nation is conceived in ethnic terms. The same applies to Slovakia. Since Hungarians and Slovaks have co-existed in southern Slovakia for a long period of time and Hungarians have been integrated within the Slovak society (whether one perceives that integration as successful or not is a different matter) we cannot talk about acculturation in contemporary Slovakia. Rather, the process that takes place is cultural accommodation; Hungarians are expected to accommodate their culture and identity to their lives in Slovakia.

Hungarians' socialisation and enculturation in Slovakia involves a complex process on a number of levels. The complexities of the inter-related character of state, nation and minorities that I discussed in the previous chapter in relation to the East Central European region apply to the case of Slovakia as well. Two additional, first, the fact that Hungary borders Slovakia and second the Hungarian government's proclaimed effort to promote the interests of Hungarians living outside Hungary, in certain ways "link" the Slovak Hungarians to Hungary.³³ The duality that Slovak Hungarians have

³³ This demonstrates itself in concrete terms, such as the establishing of foundations that support Hungarians living abroad, agreements on the governmental level with states where significant numbers of Hungarians reside but also on an abstract level when, for example, the Hungarian president Árpád Göncz annually addresses his New Year's speech to Hungarians living in Hungary and outside it or when the late Hungarian Prime

always felt in terms of their relationship to the state in which they live and culture of which they are a part, though not in geographical terms, was further deepened and complicated when Slovak identity which is constructed as to equal the national identity was differentiated in an opposition to the identities of minority groups living in the territory of Slovakia. This deliberate and government promoted construction of national identity did not only complicate the perceived duality of identities but also had immediate impacts on the lives of Slovak Hungarians.

The complementary processes of socialisation and enculturation that take place in Slovakia involve, in the light of the theoretical terms that I elaborated in the previous chapter, different issues for the Slovak ethnic group and the Hungarian one. In case of the Slovak ethnic group socialisation and enculturation involve (Slovak) national identity and (Slovak) national culture. In the case of Slovak Hungarians both processes involve two levels: socialisation into (Slovak) national identity and (Hungarian) ethnic identity and enculturation into (Slovak) national culture and (Hungarian) ethnic culture. In the case of Slovak Hungarians the extent of socialisation and enculturation can be, at least partly, a matter of choice. There are, however, certain aspects of Slovak national identity and culture that each citizen is socialised, respectively enculturated, into and these aspects involve issues connected with citizenship.

In the context of minorities the Slovak state may regulate certain aspects of socialisation and enculturation into the national identity, respectively culture; these would involve official language, state symbols etc. Choices regarding socialisation into Hungarian ethnic identity and enculturation into Hungarian culture should, however, remain free of state interference and a private matter. However, in order to enable the protection and maintenance of ethnic cultures there must be certain prerequisites and

Minister Antal announced that he perceived himself The Prime Minister of fifteen

those, such as the right to learn one's mother tongue, should be guaranteed by state.

Moreover the state should be responsible for creating conditions for the implementation of such rights. When these prerequisites are fulfilled it is then the family context in which early decisions about a child's socialisation and enculturation are made.

In the early years of their lives children's socialisation and enculturation happens mainly in the family context. In Slovakia 86.6 per cent of families are nuclear ones. However, in southern Slovakia families show a great deal of variety not only in their structure but also in their linguistic and ethnic makeup. There is a whole continuum of families between monolingual and bilingual ones and a whole range between monoethnic and biethnic since languages spoken in the family do not necessarily correspond to their makeup in terms of ethnicities. The first remarkable step in which parents demonstrate their influence on a child's socialisation and enculturation is the selection of a first name as a name denotes one's belonging to a (ethnic) community. Although parents have the freedom to choose their child's first name they have to follow certain rules. If the selected name is not a registered one, parents have to apply to the Slovak Academy of Science to receive permission to give the selected name to their child. It is, however, not only the complications of this process, which has become more flexible after 1989, that may discourage parents from selecting a Hungarian name for their child. Since Slovak and Hungarian belong to different language families, Slavic and Ugro-Finnic respectively, the first name, in addition to the surname, immediately denotes one's belonging to the Hungarian ethnic group which in some cases parents may feel undesirable, especially when Slovakia's government adopted an openly confrontational attitude to its minorities.

In addition to the selection of a name, children are also "marked" from their birth in terms of having "národnosť" (ethnicity). This "categorisation" then remains with the child for the rest of his/her life and it appears on official documents together with the category of citizenship. Under the communist regime censuses normally asked for one's ethnicity and a number of official papers, including the identity card, bore it. Being "registered" as belonging to an ethnic group usually involved parents' ethnicity or rather what was in their identity cards in the column "národnosť". This meant that in ethnically mixed families parents had to choose to which group their child be registered. After 1989 the situation has improved significantly as "národnosť" is no longer required in official documents such as passports and identity cards.

Language is a major area that is involved in cultural accommodation of Slovak Hungarians. The maintenance of Hungarian is one of the major causes of misunderstandings between Hungarians and Slovaks. Parents make choices regarding languages that are spoken at home and in which children are educated. Language choice depends on a number of factors and often reflects parents' affiliation with their ethnic group, the extent to which they perceive language as a constitutive part of ethnic identity and social status. Some Slovaks perceive Hungarians' efforts at maintaining their mother tongue (especially regarding education and public use of it) as detrimental to the status of Slovak and therefore unnecessary. This perception was further deepened by the implementation of restrictive policies regarding the use of minority languages under the Mečiar government. It is unlikely that the majority of Slovaks demonstrated attitudes that would prompt such policies; it is more likely that their implementation was made possible by the government's particular effort at constructing a "homogeneous" national identity, its purposefully created image of a "protector" of Slovak interests and its use of the "minority card" in order to divert attention from the serious abuses of

power. This, however, went hand in hand with undemocratic conduct which led to Mečiar's fall in November 1998.³⁴

The Slovak government intervened in language use most seriously by passing a language law in 1995 which restricts minority language use even in areas that are unjustified by a policy regulating the use of official and minority languages (such as medical care). The most serious insufficiency of the language law is that it does not make it possible to exercise the right to use minority languages in official conduct, a right that is guaranteed by the *Constitution of the Slovak Republic*. The passing of the language law together with the politicised nature of minority conduct created a particularly stressful and frustrating atmosphere in which parents had to make decisions about their children's socialisation and enculturation. Although children belonging to the Hungarian ethnic group are not likely to understand the whole complexity of the situation the overall atmosphere is likely to have had impact on their socialisation.

Apart from the family, other factors such as school play a role in socialisation and enculturation. Due to the length of time for which Hungarians have lived in the area of southern Slovakia and their concentration in this region of Slovakia a network of day care centres, kindergartens and schools are available that teach in Hungarian. The large majority of Hungarian kindergartens and schools are run by the state³⁵ and since schools are some of the major factors in socialisation into the national identity and enculturation into national culture (to both of which Hungarians have an ambiguous relationship) these processes take place in both Hungarian as well as Slovak schools.

³⁴ Despite Mečiar's proclaimed seclusion from politics, he became his party's nominee in the May presidential elections in Slovakia. These elections bear special significance as the Slovak president is going to be elected directly for the first time.

³⁵ There are also, for example, day care centres run by religious denominations as well as privately-owned ones.

There are, though, significant differences between the extent to which socialisation and enculturation involve national and ethnic identities/cultures in the two schools. In the Slovak school children are socialised into (Slovak) national identity and enculturated into (Slovak) national culture. Slovak schools do not, in any way, take an active role in children's socialisation and enculturation into ethnic identities/cultures. Although children learn foreign languages, these do not include Hungarian, and thus Hungarian children attending a Slovak school do not formally learn the language, history, literature etc. of their ethnic group. If parents decide to have their child educated in a Slovak school and would still like him/her to have knowledge of Hungarian language and culture they have to use other avenues. In the Hungarian school children learn all the subjects in Hungarian and have additional classes of Slovak language and literature. During these compulsory Slovak classes children acquire their knowledge of Slovak as a foreign language. Moreover, they are socialised and enculturated into their ethnic identity/culture. Although Hungarian schools are not run by local authorities but by the government's Ministry of Education, teachers in Hungarians schools are, in many cases without exception, members of the Hungarian ethnic minority. It seems like the Mečiar government realised that under these circumstances children are not "effectively" socialised into the (Slovak) national identity (a paradox in itself since they have practically been denied it) and announced its plan to appoint teachers of Slovak language and literature exclusively of Slovak origin; these efforts date back to 1995. A separate government initiative from 1997 proposed the teaching of three subjects, in addition to Slovak language and literature, in Slovak (again by teachers of Slovak origin). Hungarians perceived these moves as threatening their rights and indeed their culture. A number of protests and demonstrations were organised to prevent the government from implementing a law modifying education in

minority languages. These incidents nicely illustrate that socialisation and enculturation are not unproblematic and have concrete consequences for individuals.

The type of bilingualism formally acquired in the Hungarian school is an additive one and Hungarian schools cannot be characterised in accordance with the distinction between transitional and maintenance type of bilingual education. While maintenance bilingualism, that type which stresses the development of fluency in the majority language and at the same time does not diminish competence in the mother tongue, is, in my opinion, the most desirable form of bilingual education that enables to maintain linguistic and cultural multiplicity, it would be fiercely rejected by Hungarians living in Slovakia. I believe that a maintenance type of bilingual education would serve the interests of children who belong to ethnic minorities more than the current type of "bilingual" education that is available in Slovakia since it underestimates the importance of competence in Slovak and overemphasises the importance of being effectively educated entirely in Hungarian and learning Slovak only as a foreign language.

However, due to the legacy of the Mečiar government and the politicised nature of languages, a maintenance type of bilingual education is not possible to implement in Slovakia as it would face fierce opposition from ethnic minorities who are likely to perceive it as a sell-out. Furthermore this type of education, since it involves a greater exposure to the national identity and culture could only be implemented in case Slovak national identity was constructed in a radically different way, as giving acknowledgement to the minorities living in its territory.

Other institutions that play an important role in children's socialisation and enculturation are church and cultural institutions, among them perhaps most importantly media. The large majority of Slovak Hungarians who are associated with a religious denomination are Roman Catholics, similarly to the majority of Slovaks. In this sense

thus there is no ground for differentiation, except the language in which religious services take place. The government would find it difficult to interfere in language use in churches since the Catholic Church (and other Churches as well) in Slovakia presents itself as apolitical³⁶ and its "structure" is not dependent on the government.³⁷

Cultural institutions play a very important role in the creation and maintenance of national culture. Such institutions can thus play a major role in children's socialisation and enculturation. The electronic media are especially important since access to them is widespread. It is not only a question of which cultures are present, for example, in television programmes and on the television screen in general but also how minority groups are portrayed in the media since this can have a significant impact on attitudes and prejudices towards minority groups. The availability of minority cultural institutions, however, depends directly on state subsidies. It became clear in Slovakia that the promotion of Slovak culture was perceived as a government preference since it involved huge subsidies for seemingly culturally unimportant activities (such as the creation of busts of the prominent members of Mečiar's cabinet) compared to no subsidies for minority culture in some cases.

Another area in which the "ties" with the nation can be strengthened and which one is socialised into is holidays and festivities. Since I have already analysed aspects of this in Slovakia in a previous chapter I would just like to point out that holidays and festivities influence the lives of all citizens of a state (e.g. a public holiday means a day off, celebrations of holidays involve tax payers' money etc.) yet even including religious

³⁶ The Mečiar government got into controversy with the Union of the Archbishops of Slovakia when the Union in an open letter asked the government for more tolerance.

³⁷ Obviously, no Church is entirely independent from a government but the government has no way to interfere, for example, in the appointment of clergy and the teachings of the Church apart from cases when it may involve criminal acts.

ones all public holidays and memorable days in Slovakia reflect upon the nation as a homogeneous one.

The way in which ethnic groups define each other and interact involves stereotypes and attitudes. In Slovakia the Hungarian ethnic group, perhaps since it is Slovakia's largest ethnic group living in a compact territory and also because the Hungarian government is the most "active" in promoting the interests of its "cultural associates" out of the countries that neighbour Slovakia, has been "associated" with supposed secessionist tendencies. Slovak Hungarians can also be characterised as most "active" among Slovakia's minority groups in terms of having political parties. Thus unlike other minority groups³⁸ Hungarians also use political channels to voice their objections about violations of their rights as well as undemocratic practices which is due partly to the fact that until November 1998 Hungarian parties were in opposition but also because it seems to be the case that Hungarian political representation understands that minority rights and democracy go hand in hand. The other side of Hungarian political and cultural "exuberance" is that it is perceived by some Slovaks as a sign of permissiveness in government policies that leads to little accommodation to the Slovak society; it seems like Hungarians are willing to be integrated to the society but not accommodate themselves to the nation.

Although there is no open discrimination on an ethnic basis that would involve Hungarians,³⁹ there are instances of negative stereotypes and prejudices, even of what constitutes racial and ethnic hatred. Stereotypes and prejudices most frequently occur as part of political rhetoric, the most extreme being the one elaborated by the Slovak National Party. And in some cases political rhetoric can turn into a criminal offence.

³⁸ Except for the Roma group that also has political parties.

³⁹ The situation is much more complicated when regarding the situation of the Roma minority.

The most recent example of this is a speech presented by Ján Slota, the chairman of the Slovak National Party, on March 5, 1999 at a meeting in Kysucké Nové Mesto. An extract from the speech reads: " We will fight, we will fight. We will fight for our territory, for square meters, for every square meter. ... That is impossible, we will get into our tanks and destroy Budapest." (as broadcast in *Televízne noviny, Markíza*, March 6, 1999) This time, in contrast to the days when Slota was in Mečiar's cabinet, he was dismissed as the chairman of one of the Slovak National Council's special committees and he may face prosecution for inciting racial hatred⁴⁰ (*Plus 7 Dní*, 12, March 22, 1999, p. 14).

Other instances of attitudes demonstrated towards Hungarians include an incident from February 1997 during which skinheads singled out two Hungarian recruits (out of a group of fifteen) and attacked them. Police denied that ethnicity played a role in the incident. It was not rare to see the slogan "Na Slovensku po slovensky" ("Speak Slovak in Slovakia") sprayed on walls while the Mečiar government was in power. After the elections of November 1998 the Hungarian Coalition Party became one of the political groups that formed a coalition government. Some Slovaks understand this as a betrayal and threat, this has been suggested in discussions, in the media but also during demonstrations in front of the seat of the Slovak government. But in general terms such extreme notions are rather rare.

Studies that would involve stereotyping in Slovakia from other viewpoints than the sociological one are not available. For this reason I draw upon sociological studies and opinion polls that have dealt with the perceptions of Slovaks about Hungarians. Bútorová suggests that while socio-demographic factors did not play a significant role in

attitudes to the Hungarian minority eight years ago, the situation has changed significantly. A study that she carried out in 1997 implies that "more tolerance and openness [toward Hungarians] is demonstrated by [Slovak] women, young and middle-aged people, in contrast to pensioners; people with higher education in contrast to people with lower levels of education; inhabitants of medium-sized and larger settlements in contrast to those from very small settlements. The most important differentiating factor is education" (Bútorová, 1998: 210, my translation). Another very important factor in Slovak attitudes to Hungarians that has been gaining increasing significance since 1989 is the ethnically "clean" or "mixed" area in which Slovaks reside. Slovaks who live in mixed areas, that is they are in contact with members of the Hungarian minority group, show more tolerance whereas Slovaks living in districts with no Hungarian inhabitants show less tolerance and empathy and incline to support confrontational policies regarding minorities. Nonetheless, the most important differentiating factor is that of affiliation with a political party. Individuals associated with opposition parties (which, however became government parties following the September 1998 elections) showed most tolerant attitudes while supporters of the Slovak National Party and the Movement for Democratic Slovakia demonstrated least tolerant attitudes to the Hungarian minority. It is not surprising that supporters of the Slovak National Party showed most confrontational attitudes. These findings suggest a possible link between beliefs in democracy and tolerance towards minorities. This support of democracy and minorities may, at least in some cases, be the direct outcome of the Mečiar government's confrontational and hostile policies on minority issues since these possibly alerted many

⁴⁰ It has to be noted here that the Slovak National Council's Committee on Mandates and Immunity decided that Ján Slota should not be prosecuted.

Slovaks (certainly Hungarians) to further implications of the undemocratic principles held by Mečiar and his supporters.

Another interesting area in terms of perceptions about the Hungarian minority was brought into the surface in an opinion poll that involved Slovaks and was carried out in October 1997. In this poll twenty-two per cent of respondents believe the situation of the Hungarian minority improved since 1994, thirty-nine per cent think it did not change, eighteen per cent believe it worsened and twenty-one per cent do not know how it changed (Bútorová, 1998: 199).

Attitudes to minorities and their demonstrations in concrete terms are to a large extent the outcome of socialisation. That is why the way in which national identity and cultural contact is understood plays a significant role in the co-existence of ethnic groups within multiethnic states. However if socialisation and enculturation take place under circumstances in which confrontational and openly hostile attitudes toward minorities are advocated it has an effect on relations between ethnic groups. Although children may not fully comprehend the complexities of socialisation and enculturation, the divisions that exist and are actively created in Slovakia are likely to have impact on their understanding of identities and demonstrates itself, for example, in relation to language choice. The following two chapters deal with children's language choice in relation to one of the most powerful socialising agents, television, in the largely bilingual area of southern Slovakia. Chapter V considers theoretical issues relating to children as audience, research traditions, language choice while Chapter VI discusses my study conducted in the southern Slovakian town of Štúrovo.

CHAPTER V

TELEVISION, CHILDREN AND LANGUAGE CHOICE IN SOUTHERN SLOVAKIA

In the previous chapters I have suggested possible influences of media on the creation of national identity and on children's socialisation. I have also argued that broadcasting in minority languages is essential for the maintenance of those languages and subsequently of ethnic/national minority groups. I have also suggested that between 1993 and 1998 minority language use was highly politicised and became a confrontational issue in the independent Slovak Republic. In order to discuss the relation between children's television viewing and language choice in the largely bilingual area of southern Slovakia under the circumstances that I explored in the previous chapters I will examine research traditions relating to studies on children and television, issues concerning television and language choice and finally questions relating to narratives. The influence of television cannot, however, be discussed without paying due attention to its audience, in this case children. Indeed, this research project will attempt to shed light on children's uses of media and its possible effects on their language preferences as well as on the ways in which language preferences are reflected in programme choice.

I have already argued that the way in which the use of television, a mass culture medium, influences identity formation of minorities in terms of "access to language" is significant especially in areas with minority populations. Television is a medium in which the public use of minority languages can be encouraged or restricted. The presence of minority languages on television can be combined with other important

factors such as choice of the language of education and official conduct which influence the maintaining of minority languages. Although broadcasting in minority languages is an important prerequisite, in itself it does not necessarily play a pivotal role in language maintenance. It is the actual use of television and the ways in which it is appropriated that is telling of its role in the lives of minority communities. Children use and appropriate television in a variety of ways and incorporate television viewing within their social lives, especially in relation to peers. Yet children also represent an audience that does not necessarily constantly exercise its free will due to restrictions imposed by adults, most notably parents.

Apart from playing a possible role in language maintenance, television might be used as a device for learning a language. Media research (McQuail 1994, Lowery and DeFleur, 1995, Findahl 1989) as well as anecdotal evidence support the claim that television viewing has a constitutive role in language learning.

As already suggested, the context in which television viewing happens is of extreme importance in understanding the ways in which viewers use, interpret and appropriate television (Morley 1988). Viewers do not only experience social context on the television screen but also in the television viewing situation itself. As I have previously pointed out, for children the context of television viewing can have influence on their socialisation since, for example, power and gender relations within family get reflected in the television viewing context, parents use television as a "disciplinary tool" and the restrictions they put on children's television viewing indicate their own presumptions about television effects, which, it has to be stressed here, are not necessarily considered to be negative (Jordan 1992).

Although this project focuses on the context of television viewing, in terms of children's choices regarding particular programmes their content might be of profound

importance. Other conditions which may play an important role in children's choices in southern Slovakia, apart from language, parents' influence and content are peers.

Children, similarly to adults (Morley 1988), are likely to discuss their favourite television programmes, especially soaps/series/serials, with peers and even if this does not necessarily mean becoming fans of a soap or series, the issues and characters of the soaps/series/serials might become references around which communication revolves. It is likely that friends will watch the same soaps/series/serials and discuss them. Children may occasionally watch television programmes or video together and can be involved in media related role play. Thus when considering language choice and the influence of the peer group children may actually watch certain programmes in a language which is a non-preferred one in terms of education and family context.

However, the language component of television viewing is not likely to reflect a straightforward relationship to the languages spoken by children or even within family context. It is likely that monolingual children will be educated in the given language, let us presume the official one, in this case Slovak, and might find it of little or no importance to speak Hungarian. Nonetheless, they may still watch a television programme in Hungarian under certain circumstances, for example if it is not available in Slovak and it does not require developed language skills or as it has been already suggested it involves belonging to a peer group.

Audience studies offer another dimension of consideration regarding children's choices and uses of media (Fiske and Hartley 1978, Corner 1991, McQuail 1994). In this research tradition attention has been paid to possible and actual uses of television by an active audience. A first approach one can mention is the uses and gratifications theory which challenged the focus of media research by stressing the fact that audiences use television for gratification of needs. McQuail argues that from the

earliest and dominant version ... [as captured in] one much quoted statement (Katz et al., 1974, p. 20) of a functional version of the theory describes the approach as being concerned with '(1) the social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in (6) need gratifications and (7) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones.' (1994: 318)

a shift has occurred to a new definition that would read:

(1) Personal social circumstances and psychological dispositions together influence both (2) general habits of media use and also (3) beliefs and expectations about the benefits offered by media, which shape (4) specific acts of media choice and consumption, followed by (5) assessments of the value of the experience (with consequences for further media use) and, possibly, (6) applications of benefits acquired in other areas of experience and social activity. (1994: 319)

This shift in the uses and gratifications approach can be demonstrated, for instance, in relation to criticism presented by James Lull (1995). He directs his criticism at the insufficient coverage of the social and cultural realities and also argues that the theory uses, and in fact depends on, cognitive concepts such as needs, motives and gratification without developing an appropriate theory of cognition. In order to cover the realities of the social and cultural world in which audiences live, Lull develops the concept of "method". Method is a motivated (because of the social and cultural realities) means of need gratification. Use is thus actually part of method. Although Lull acknowledges and incorporates the existence of social and cultural structures in the audience experience, he claims that these symbolic structures can actually be overcome through imagination. That is why an understanding of audience activities as simply gratifying needs is insufficient.

David Morley (1993) argues that recent audience work in media studies can be characterised by two presumptions. The audience is always active and media content is

always polysemic, thus open to interpretation. "Recent reception studies that document audience autonomy and offer optimistic/redemptive readings of mainstream media texts have often been taken to represent not simply a challenge to a simple-minded effects or dominant ideology model, but rather as, in themselves, documenting the total absence of media influence, in the "semiotic democracy" of postmodern pluralism." (1993: 15) The problem of such studies is that one cannot assume an equivalence between producers and consumers of messages as this

ignores de Certeau's (1984) distinction between the strategies of the powerful and the tactics of the weak - or, as Morley and Silverstone have argued elsewhere (1990), the difference between having power over a text, and power over the agenda within which that text is constructed and presented. The power of viewers to reinterpret meanings is hardly equivalent to the discursive power of centralized media institutions to construct the texts that the viewer then interprets, and to imagine otherwise is simply foolish. (1993: 16)

Sonia Livingstone (1993) argues that the convergence of administrative and critical traditions within mass communication research during the 1980's gave rise to the need for a rethinking of key issues within media research, such as the untenable separation of interpersonal and mass communication and the context-dependent and varied nature of television watching.

In the last 10 years, we have identified two developments that have significant implications for the future of the field. First, the old polarities that had long structured the field have been finally transcended (or deconstructed) and cannot easily be returned to. Second, a new set of questions is emerging, both theoretical and methodological, which concern a range of particular issues and processes rather than generalities expressed in terms of the now untenable categories of viewer, media, effect (1993: 11).

One of the most recent approaches to audience studies has to do with the question of narrativity, which is an important aspect for this project. It has been

suggested that human beings construct narratives in order to make sense of the events happening around them as well as of their own identities (Alasuutari 1996). The same is true about children who create narratives in order to comprehend the world around them and reflect upon it. Agents of socialisation play an active role in children's creation and understanding of narratives. Research connected to narratives and the media has concentrated on the notion of television programmes presenting narratives of social and cultural value which are identified by children as either valid for their own experience and milieu or not. Suggestions have been made that television narratives have a significant impact on children's perception of reality (Schrag 1991) but it has also been demonstrated that children are in fact able to distinguish the reality dimension of television content satisfactorily; however this may differ significantly depending on age (Dorr 1990).

Taking into account Alasuutari's (1996) and Schrag's (1991) contributions to this particular question, narratives are going to be understood for the purposes of this research project as a constitutive element in children's understanding of social and cultural realities. Children's narratives and their abilities to judge the validity of narratives (which they either "consume" or in fact "produce") do not have an inherent nature (Schrag 1991) but rather a learnt one. That is why social and cultural structures which constitute children's reality will be reflected in their narratives regarding television viewing.

It has been made already clear that the social and cultural experience at which this research project is directed is the experience of language choice in connection with television viewing. In the previous chapter I have already outlined specific circumstances and conditions in which language choice occurs as well as the

interference of governments in language choice and paid special attention to the case of Slovakia. For this reason I would like to briefly summarise some of the relevant points.

Perceived status of a language does not depend on any notions such as size of the minority group, its social and educational profile but rather strictly on the "feeling" of actual language users that they are in a subordinate status to those who use another language. One of the aims of this project is to explore the way in which children perceive the status of languages spoken in the region as well as outside it. Parents' choices regarding education can also reflect the perceived status of language. They can stress the importance of mastering the official language (thus sending children to a Slovak school/encouraging watching television in Slovak rather than Hungarian although parents feel more comfortable using Hungarian) since Slovak might be perceived as a key to social success (in terms of further education, for example). On the other hand as Hungarian is a minority language its status might be perceived among its users as belonging to the private sphere or indeed as being used only on certain levels of communication rather than on the full scale available. The language of schooling plays an important role in children's language preferences regarding television viewing not only in relation to exposure to the two languages at different levels but also because of the relationships children form in the school. It is likely that among children's friends their school mates will be an influential group.

Children's preferences regarding languages in which they watch television are likely to be reflected in terms of programmes in local languages. It is likely that children attending a Hungarian school will show less interest in programmes broadcast in Slovak while their counterparts in Slovak school who are used to speaking both Slovak and Hungarian will show more diversity in terms of television watching. These differences are perhaps going to be slighter in the case of foreign language television

programmes. One of the interesting questions that arises is whether it is language competence that prevents children who attend the Hungarian school from watching in Slovak. If this proves to be the case then the efficiency of teaching of Slovak in Hungarian schools as it is currently provided can be questioned. It is also likely that more children attending the Slovak school will feel more comfortable using both languages than those in the Hungarian school. It is however equally possible that the differences in television watching habits between children attending the two schools are not so marked.

CHILDREN AND TELEVISION: RESEARCH TRADITIONS

Discussions regarding influences of television on children's behaviour and cognitive development have been of major concern since the very first studies in the field of media effects research as early as 1929. Buckingham claims that "at a conservative estimate, there have probably been over seven thousand accounts of research in the field published since the introduction of television in the 1950s, ranging from brief reports of one-off experiments to extensive and lavishly funded surveys" (1998: 131). It is clear that the sheer scope of research makes it impossible to give a brief and concise summary of the most important findings; instead I would like to outline some of the most important areas of interest and approaches within research on children and television which are relevant to this study.

The effects of violence on television on children have been a major preoccupation of research together with stereotyping and social learning. Buckingham argues that a large proportion of research in these areas as well as on children and advertising suffers from methodological limitations. In her review on studies on advertising and children Norma Pecora argues that "underlying this work [on television

advertising for children] - like that on children and media in general - is the assumption that children are a special audience needing protection. Unfortunately, nothing in these studies indicates an increasingly sophisticated perspective of the child. Terms and categories are shuffled about, but no real progress is made" (1995: 359).

During the past two decades the notion of children as active viewers has informed much of the research conducted in this field. Buckingham discusses the contribution, or rather shortcomings, of uses and gratifications and constructive (or cognitive) approaches. I have already briefly outlined issues concerning the uses and gratification's theory, the second approach is concerned with psychological processes in which viewers construct meaning from television programmes. Some of the research in this area includes attention and comprehension, understanding of narratives and developmental studies. This approach, Buckingham argues, however, has very serious limitations since it does not take into account the social and cultural contexts in which children live. Buckingham also discusses the possible contributions of cultural studies in the research on children and television. His discussion includes three areas of interest within cultural studies: institutions, texts (arguing that textual analysis is missing from traditional mass communication research) and audiences. In the third sphere the contribution of cultural studies is seen in a "perspective on the audience which is significantly more 'social' than that of the research discussed above." (Buckingham, 1998: 141) In methodological terms cultural studies have contributed with its semiotic and ethnographic approaches to children's viewing.

Sonia Livingstone argues that while researchers in media studies show awareness of the mediated nature of childhood and youth, the sociology of childhood neglects this aspect of children's lives. Moreover, "child psychology does acknowledge the media, but mainly in relation to cognitive development, and much of it remains,

problematically, wedded to the effects tradition." (1998: 438) More influential links exist between media and youth studies although the latter may often narrowly focus on particular media or certain aspects of audiences.

Research on children and media has been often linked to public policies. The perceptions of parents and teachers can be influential in terms of regulations of television programmes. Some schools and kindergartens, for example, do not use television and video in the process of teaching. The scope of this research project does not make it possible to discuss the implications of television viewing for educational policies (such as media literacy curricula) yet I find it important at least to discuss teachers' notions about television's possible influence on children's behaviour and cognitive development.

"Western" research on children's use of media addresses a large number of issues and concerns. There is considerably less research available in Slovakia, especially regarding recent developments; in addition most of the research remains connected with the effects tradition. In order to explore the issue of language choice in relation to television viewing one needs to take into account the factors discussed in the previous chapters. Moreover there is a need to explore the actual uses of television by children in a variety of contexts as well as their narratives that relate to television programmes and television viewing and reflect upon understanding of cultural differences. At a young age family plays a significant role in children's socialisation, together with the schooling environment and the peer group. These agents are indeed influential also in respect of children's language choice and uses of media and that is the reason why they are key elements in the study that I conducted in the southern Slovakian town of Štúrovo and which I discuss in detail in the following chapter.

CHAPTER VI

LANGUAGE CHOICE AND TELEVISION VIEWING IN ŠTÚROVO, SLOVAKIA

This project is designed to explore five major factors in children's language choice in the largely bilingual area of southern Slovakia. Two factors, namely legal and political influences and the perceived status of language were discussed in previous chapters. The remaining three factors include education, television influences and parents' influence on children's language learning and use. I discuss these issues in relation to the study I conducted in 1998 in the southern Slovakian town of Štúrovo in this chapter.

The study explored language choice in relation to television viewing exercised by second-graders in the southern Slovakian town of Štúrovo. The methodology used during the study involved mainly qualitative approaches, such as focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and specially designed exercises. I deal with these in detail in the following sections.

Two primary schools were chosen as sites in which the study was conducted. One of them is a primary school with Slovak as language of teaching and the other one is with Hungarian as language of teaching. The sites were chosen due to practical considerations (such as the availability of children, different languages used in the educational process) but more importantly because the choice of the language of education does not only represent parents' language preferences but also reflects upon their understanding of ethnicity and nationality and their relations and attitudes to minority and majority groups.

Ethnic Hungarian parents who send their children to a Slovak school show different attitudes and preferences than those who send their children to a Hungarian

school. It is possible to think about parents' decisions regarding the language of education in terms of boundary maintaining behaviour. Hungarian parents who send their children to a Hungarian school show a stronger preference for boundary maintaining than those Hungarian parents who send their children to a Slovak school. The same is true about the processes of socialisation and enculturation, as I have already argued, whose major agents are at this age family and school. Parents are likely to select the school that better reflects their own understanding and practice of socialisation and enculturation.

The choice of the two schools thus takes into account not only practical considerations but also conceptual ones.

SETTING

To investigate the above mentioned questions I conducted research in the southern Slovakian town of Štúrovo⁴¹. The town has about 13,320 inhabitants and 73.8 per cent of them belong to the Hungarian ethnic minority group according to data from 1990⁴². The town lies on the border with Hungary by the river Danube.

Throughout its history Štúrovo has gone through changes in terms of territorial "status".

The settlement has been Roman, Magyar, Turkish, Hungarian, Turkish again, Austro-Hungarian, Czechoslovak, Hungarian, Czechoslovak again and finally Slovak. After the

⁴¹ Until June 26, 1948 the town was called Parkan, this name dates back to the 13th century. The communist leadership has somewhat ironically decided to change the name of the town with the majority of its inhabitants being Hungarians and name it after the most prominent representative of the 19th century movement for Slovak emancipation, Ľudovít Štúr. After the fall of communism referenda were held in various places about re-naming of settlements to their original names. The Mečiar government has been very reluctant, to say the least, to allow names of Hungarian origin. The clearest example of this happened in Kolárovo in 1995 when despite the will of the inhabitants to change the name back to Gúta this did not happen.

⁴² According to my source, "Štúrovský-párkányi partner" published in 1998, 24.6 per cent of the inhabitants are Slovaks. 68.2 per cent of inhabitants are Roman Catholics.

Second World War the town's demographic make-up changed significantly. A large proportion of its Jewish population was deported, Czech and Slovak commissars were sent to the border region to supervise the "unreliable" Hungarian owners of farms, mills, shops and factories which were to be nationalised in February 1948. Some of the town's inhabitants decided to voluntarily leave for Hungary; others were forced to leave under the "exchange of inhabitants" scheme promoted by the Slovak branch of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. Under communism there was not much interest in encouraging a diversity of cultural identities and there was no desire to make contact between Slovak Hungarians and Hungarians too close (moreover Hungary's "goulash communism" perhaps presented an ideological threat) and thus the bridge that was destroyed during the Second World War and that connected Štúrovo with the Hungarian Esztergom was never rebuilt⁴³. After the fall of communism hope has arisen that the bridge will finally be rebuilt, symbolising the countries opening-up to democracy. But the Mečiar government refused to take effective steps in this matter despite negotiations with the Hungarian government. This was just another example of the government's policy regarding its minorities and a particularly frustrating instance for the inhabitants of Štúrovo.

After the fall of communism a multi-party system was introduced and, understandably enough, Hungarian parties have had a dominant albeit not exclusive position in the town council of Štúrovo. The inhabitants of Štúrovo and its political

⁴³ According to Mravík (1968) work on rebuilding the bridge has started already in 1965 but has been slowed down because of the intention to build the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros dam which has not been built to date. There is however a ferry available if one wants to cross the Danube.

representation demonstrated their opposition to the undemocratic policies and practices of the Mečiar government. In May 1997 the government effectively prevented a referendum on joining the NATO and direct presidential elections. In 1998 the town council decided to hold the referendum with the original four questions despite government warnings of the illegality of such a step and threats of drawing in police and the army to "ensure public safety". The mayor of Štúrovo addressed mayors of other settlements to hold the referendum in its original form as a protest against the government's undemocratic conduct. Only one settlement joined in the initiative. Mečiar's government understood this symbolic act as defiance and threatened with retaliatory action (such as budget cuts) but did not last long enough to implement the threats. By organising the referendum the inhabitants of Štúrovo clearly demonstrated their concern about Slovakia's future European and transatlantic integration. To some Slovaks the move, however, strengthened the perceived threats of southern Slovakia declaring autonomy and eventually independence.

There have not been major instances of ethnic/national hatred in the town, though the "war of the signs" illustrates the existence of tensions. When in 1994 following the passing of the so-called language law the town council put up signs denoting the name of the town in two languages the signs would regularly be sprayed over. The inadequacies of the 1995 language law that I discussed in theoretical terms are reflected in the town. It is enough to look at the way in which the names of streets that comprise Hungarian names and expressions are translated and "transcribed" into Slovak.

I have outlined the government's approach to subsidies for minority cultures. Despite those efforts CSEMADOK, the most important Hungarian cultural association, remained active in the town together with dance groups and clubs. In terms of cultural

co-operation the link between Štúrovo and Esztergom has been a strong one despite the obstacles put forward by the Slovak government. Hungarian artists have been invited to give their performances in the town and exhibit their works in the town's art gallery.

In terms of education there are kindergartens with classes where either Slovak or Hungarian is spoken. There is one primary school with Slovak as language of teaching (referred to as Slovak school), one with Hungarian as language of teaching (Hungarian school) and a primary school for children with special needs (these are mostly children whose cognitive development does not make it possible for them to attend a regular primary school). Secondary education is also available in both Hungarian and Slovak. In addition to the two primary schools (grades one to nine) the grammar school provides education in both languages from grade five upward.

Media are also available in both languages. There is a daily newspaper published in Hungarian and magazines and journals are imported from Hungary and are widely available in the town together with Hungarian books, videos, CDs and tapes. In terms of television and radio broadcasting both local as well as Hungarian television and radio stations are available. Since my project involves television viewing in particular, I briefly review television channels available in the town. Without the need of any special equipment two Slovak government-run television channels are available (STV 1 and STV 2), a Slovak commercial channel (Markíza), a Hungarian state-run television channel (MTV 1) and one or two Hungarian commercial television channels (depending on the aerials used). In addition to these cable and satellite television are also available.

SCHOOLS

In Slovakia children begin attending primary school at the age of six. I have already mentioned that there are two primary schools available in Štúrovo for first to

fourth grade pupils if we disregard the primary school for children with special educational needs⁴⁴. Parents thus make a decision between sending their children to the Slovak or Hungarian primary school. In the Slovak school all subjects are taught in Slovak, foreign language classes do not include Hungarian. In the Hungarian school all subjects are taught in Hungarian and in addition to them children also attend compulsory classes of Slovak.

The two primary schools are in the same district, in fact they are exactly opposite each other. Each year approximately the same number of children enter the two schools, there were ninety-five second-graders in the Slovak school and slightly over a hundred in the Hungarian school at the time this project was conducted. These numbers may in themselves not be very telling. Yet if we take into account that about seventy per cent of the inhabitants are Hungarians this would mean that about twenty per cent of Hungarian children go to the Slovak school⁴⁵.

In both schools there are school clubs for first- to fourth-grade pupils. These are afternoon care centres where children are under the supervision of trained staff who, however, are not regular teachers. Children normally have one teacher for all the major subjects⁴⁶ within the first four grades. School club teachers usually get to know almost all of the children either because they normally supervise a particular group of children only for a year and also because they are involved in extra curricular activities (such as a dance club, foreign language teaching etc.). This in fact means that teachers and school

⁴⁴ This school is attended by a considerably lower number of children than either the Slovak or the Hungarian primary school. While each year about two hundred first graders enter the two schools there are only about thirty entering the primary school for children with special educational needs.

⁴⁵ Obviously, even individuals who claim to be Slovaks can speak both Slovak and Hungarian.

⁴⁶ It is possible that a different teacher would teach music or physical education.

club teachers have a chance to follow children's development from a close perspective during a four-year span.

In the Slovak school the classrooms and school club rooms and other facilities (such as the canteen) are concentrated within one complex of buildings. In the Hungarian school they were forced to move some of the classrooms outside the main complex of buildings. So children who attend school clubs and have their lunch in the canteen have to take a twenty-minute walk back to the school. This inconvenience may partly explain the fact that fewer second-graders are in school clubs in the Hungarian school than in the Slovak. For second-graders, with whom the project is particularly concerned, there are four school clubs in the Slovak school compared to two in the Hungarian.

CHILDREN'S DAILY PROGRAMME

School usually starts at 8 a.m. Second-graders have classes till about 12.30. Some children leave the school after classes, others stay in the school clubs. The school clubs are open until about 4 p.m. Some parents come to pick up their children, other children walk home either with their friends or on their own.

Children normally write their homework in the school clubs and take part in extra-curricular activities which are often conducted in a separate classroom since not all children attending a school club take part in them, such activities include classes of foreign languages, ethics and religious education. At special occasions children also prepare small performances in the school clubs (such as Christmas carols and sketches).

The atmosphere in the school clubs is less "disciplined" and rigid than in the regular classes. There are more opportunities to talk to the children and engage them in activities in the school clubs than during regular classes. Also, principals and teachers,

no matter how co-operative and helpful they are, are under pressure because of the curriculum and interviewing children during regular classes would increase that pressure. For these reasons I decided to conduct interviews, focus group discussions and other activities with children in the school clubs.

FAMILIES

The prevalent form of family structure in Slovakia is the nuclear family. Štúrovo is no exception. The atmosphere of the town is typically middle class. Until the 1950's the town and its surrounding area were mainly agricultural and there was a movement from the neighbouring villages to the town when a paper mill was built in the town. About 86.6 per cent⁴⁷ of Slovak families are nuclear; out of all families 39.5 have no children, 22.2 per cent have one child and the rest have two and more children.

In terms of familial language use there is a whole continuum between monolingual Slovak and monolingual Hungarian families. Although I am not concerned at the moment with definitions of bilingual competencies, it is, nonetheless, true that each individual speaks Slovak to a different degree since it is impossible to avoid the use of Slovak at the workplace and in official conduct. I am, however, interested in children's language preferences in relation to television viewing since here language use is not confined by any necessities, but is the children's choice.

METHOD

For the purposes of my project a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods proved to be appropriate. I analysed statistical data but the core of the project consists of focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and exercises with

⁴⁷ These are 1997 data.

children in school clubs. Teachers have allowed me to spend whole afternoons with children in the school clubs⁴⁸.

I was helped in the selection of children for focus groups by school club teachers. They would select children of both genders at random, mostly including those who were eager to take part. At the beginning of each focus group discussion I introduced myself to the children, who knew each other, told them about the purposes of my discussion and asked them to introduce themselves, using their first names only. I also asked them to raise hands if they had something to say and if possible answer one by one. Raising hands did not prevent them from adding something even if the discussion moved on, however most of the time they were so zealous that they shouted anyway. I also tried to reassure them at the beginning of each focus group discussion that they were not undergoing a test. There were a very few cases when children refused to take part in a focus group discussion (or an individual interview). At the end of each discussion I thanked the children and distributed some sweets to everyone in the school club.

PILOT STUDY

In June 1998 I carried out a pilot study in the primary school with Slovak as the language of teaching. The study involved second-grade pupils and consisted of two group discussions and twelve individual interviews (five girls and seven boys). There were altogether about thirty children involved in the pilot study. This study did not

⁴⁸ There was more caution on the part of school club teachers in the Hungarian school. In the Slovak primary school they were more relaxed about my presence. One of the possible reasons for this difference is that I have in fact attended the Slovak school as a child, yet on the other hand I also know teachers and principals at the Hungarian school. I nonetheless believe that this was primarily due to the tense atmosphere that at the time surrounded education in minority languages as a result of the Mečiar government's confrontational approach.

contaminate my sample for the autumn interviews since the children whom I interviewed in June were already third-graders in the autumn when I conducted the research project. In the pilot study I also asked children to draw for me. One of the group discussions was conducted during a regular class and the teacher was present, the other one and the individual interviews were done in the school club. My main aim in this pilot study was to test my set of questions and also the "suitability" of this age group. Originally the project was designed to explore television watching habits and language choices of fourth grade pupils. However only a limited number of fourth grade pupils was available in the school clubs and thus I changed the age group to second-graders for the primary study.

Originally fourth grade pupils were chosen because they are the last age group that goes to the school club and in addition to that from the fifth grade on children can also attend the already mentioned grammar school. Fourth grade is thus the last grade in which all children from the town are attending one of the two primary schools⁴⁹. My decision to conduct interviews, focus group discussions and exercises in the school club rather than during regular classes has a number of reasons. First of all, school clubs are afternoon care centres where children are under the supervision of trained staff, who, however, are not regular teachers. School clubs are open for first- to fourth-grade pupils but not all of them stay in the school club for the afternoon. Normally out of a class of thirty children about fifteen to twenty visit the school club on a daily basis. School clubs open immediately after the regular classes finish and stay open till about 4 p.m. Not all the children remain in the school club until 4 p. m., the time when they

leave the school club usually corresponds to parents' working hours. The school club teacher is present in the classroom (the regular classrooms are used for these purposes) all the time and involves the children in a variety of extra-curricular activities (these can range from learning foreign languages to writing homework and preparing performances for special occasions such as Christmas).

There are not many significant differences between fourth-grade and second-grade pupils regarding language issues and their link to television watching. However one difference may be that second-grade children spend less time in the classroom and more at home or in the school club, thus being likely to be more exposed to the influence of schoolmates and parents than fourth-grade children. The two-year age difference does not necessarily mean stricter parental control in relation to television viewing but rather control over different types of programmes. Late night viewing is unlikely to occur with second- as well as fourth-grade pupils. The time until which children can watch television is likely to differ with families as well as depend on weekday and weekend criteria.

Second-grade pupils are capable of reading and writing, and some of them are already learning foreign languages. It is likely though that more fourth-grade pupils learn foreign languages than second-grade ones, yet on the other hand second-grade pupils are, at least hypothetically, more prone to watch cartoons which may make Cartoon Network appealing despite the lack of knowledge of English.

Regarding siblings, second-grade pupils have, according to information gained from teachers in the school club, "young" (less than thirty years old) parents and this means that most children are likely to have younger siblings. This may differ with fourth-grade pupils who may have older siblings but from the point of view of this

⁴⁹ I disregard the primary school for children with special educational needs here because

project the age difference between siblings is not of major interest; it could have been included among the sampling criteria if it were considered a significant factor but it was not.

Questions for the pilot interviews were aimed at soliciting information about children's favourite television channels and programmes, family influences on their habits, such as restrictions on television watching imposed by members of the family and people outside it, watching television with members of the family and others, discussing television programmes with friends and relatives and selection of television programmes. Individual interviews further elaborated on these questions.

The findings of the pilot study made it clear that most of the interviewed children are bilingual, at least in terms of watching both Hungarian and Slovak television programmes. There was only one case out of the twelve in which Hungarian television channels were not watched at home because nobody in the family speaks Hungarian. The individual interviews also showed that in addition to Hungarian channels, children had no concerns watching Cartoon Network. Some children claimed to watch cartoons in English that do not require knowledge of English (such as *Tom and Jerry*). Yet on the other hand more sophisticated (in language terms) programmes were also mentioned, these included for example *Johnny Bravo*, *Mask* and *Cow and Chicken*. Children said they enjoyed these cartoons despite their inability to fully understand English.

In terms of television channels the absolute favourite proved to be the Slovak commercial channel Markíza, followed by the Hungarian commercial channel RTL Klub. A few children also mentioned Cartoon Network as their favourite one. Interestingly enough, names of German channels did not come up during the

of the small number of children who attend it.

discussion and only in one individual interview did a girl mention watching in German because she was learning German.

Children seem to base their choices on other factors than language. In the discussion on the ways in which they choose what to watch, children mentioned schoolmates and friends who would tell them about good television programmes. In some cases siblings' influence proved to play a key role not only in advising about television programmes but in fact in "usurping" the television set by an older sibling.

The pilot study included a drawing activity in which I asked children to draw new television characters. I intended to solicit further information about children's favourite programmes and also to use the drawing activity as a basis for individual interviews. Some children chose to draw their favourite characters and others chose to combine new and old, for example in the form of a female cat Tomica for the *Tom and Jerry* cartoon.

The influence of parents proved to be a complex issue. Parents usually make attempts at regulating children's television viewing habits and selection of programmes. In addition, television is often used as a disciplining tool yet, according to children's reports, parents are rather inconsistent in their attitudes to children's television viewing. This inconsistency is partly due to other tasks that keep them busy, often actually forgetting about what was previously said and in many cases simply because parents are not present. Thus even though parents may believe that their guidance is needed, they may be prevented from exercising their influence in this matter. Although children talked about ways that made it possible to watch programmes forbidden by parents, I do not want to suggest that they use these "tricks" all the time or that parents' influence is negligible. Rather, the pilot study suggests that children spend a significant amount of time without parents (either at home or elsewhere, e.g. at granny's) when the rules

regarding television watching set up by parents are not necessarily observed. Even when parents are present rules do not necessarily apply as I have already suggested. Other forms of punishment (such as not being allowed to go out) were considered to be more severe than not being allowed to watch television.

Thus the pilot study also showed that it is of crucial importance to learn more about children's daily schedules as it would make it clearer when they have time to watch television and whether this perhaps matches the times when parents are at home. Some children mentioned that rules about watching television were more relaxed during the weekend, also that this is mostly the time when they watch programmes together with other family members.

The pilot study made it clear that second-graders were a suitable age group for the purposes of my study. Focus groups with children made me aware of additional questions to be included in the questionnaire for the primary study. It also became clear that focus groups presented a useful starting point in my work with the children since they felt safe in the company of others they knew when facing an unknown person. The school club proved to be an ideal place for conducting focus groups, individual interviews and exercises. It is mainly its relaxed atmosphere and the unstructured character of activities that made children easily available. Having conducted the pilot study I decided to include other exercises rather than the drawing exercise which is somewhat lengthy and not very informative that would also act as checks for inconsistencies in interviews or focus groups. Finally, I decided to ask parents to talk to me informally about their children's and their own television habits since children spend most of their time viewing television in the family context. I also decided to talk to teachers and school club teachers as it turned out to be the case that television

programmes are a topic frequently discussed not only among children but also with the staff at the school.

THE STUDY

The primary study was conducted in November/December 1998. I have received permission from principals of the two primary schools (with the language of teaching Slovak and Hungarian, respectively) to conduct focus groups, individual interviews and exercises in the school clubs. I have introduced my project to the heads of school club teachers in the two schools who then introduced me to individual school club teachers with whom I worked out the schedule for interviews etc. I started in the Slovak school, there were four school clubs, I conducted one focus group in each of them and another one with a different group of children from the second school club. The five focus groups involved thirty children. Focus groups were normally conducted in a separate classroom without the school club teacher, in one case the teacher preferred the discussion to take place in the classroom, children taking part in the focus group were separated from the other children. Focus groups were followed by individual interviews, these were conducted in the classroom, I talked to one child at a time while others were involved in other activities. The majority of children whom I interviewed took part in a focus group discussion, however if other children also wanted to be interviewed I did not refuse them; there were two such cases in the Slovak school. Altogether I interviewed eighteen children. I spent more than a week at the Slovak school, spending almost every afternoon at the school clubs (except days when children were not at the school clubs, e.g. went on a trip or to an exhibition). I would normally conduct one focus group and about five individual interviews per day. Having finished

work with children I interviewed teachers and parents who came to pick up their children from school clubs.

The situation in the Hungarian school differed significantly. Similarly to the Slovak school I also conducted focus groups followed by individual interviews. I, however, only spent three days at the school clubs. This is partly due to the more structured character of school club activities, to the smaller number of children (only two school clubs) as well as to more caution on the part of the school club teachers. I conducted four focus groups (they involved twenty-one children) and thirteen individual interviews. All focus groups were conducted in a separate classroom and all interviews in the school clubs. I did not encounter parents in the Hungarian school and only two school club teachers took part in informal interviews.

I established very good relations with principals, teachers and school club teachers in both schools. As I have already mentioned my presence in the Hungarian school was treated with more caution. Children themselves proved to be very quick at getting used to me and interviewing. There was considerable excitement among them yet most of the time they behaved in a disciplined manner. In one case in the Hungarian school I had to interrupt a focus group discussion because of children's behaviour.

SAMPLE

Thirty second-graders (seventeen boys and thirteen girls) took part in focus group discussions and the already mentioned two exercises in the Slovak primary school. The number of children taking part in the focus groups in the Hungarian school was lower, twenty-one (fifteen boys and six girls⁵⁰). The difference in numbers is due to

⁵⁰ I would have liked to have more control over the sample in terms of children's gender but the circumstances in the field (e.g. the availability of children and their willingness to take part in the interviews) made it impossible.

the smaller number of children attending the school clubs in the Hungarian school. This is due to at least three factors. First of all, the already mentioned dislocation of classrooms from the main complex of buildings in which the school clubs are situated. Secondly, it seems like children are involved in more structured extracurricular activities than in the Slovak school and thirdly, more children refused to take part in the focus groups and interviews in the Hungarian school. The sizes of focus groups varied from four to seven.

I conducted eighteen individual interviews in the Slovak school with twelve girls and six boys. Two of the girls did not take part in the previously conducted focus group discussions. In the Hungarian school thirteen children (three girls and ten boys) were involved in the individual interviews, one girl not taking part in a focus group discussion.

In the Slovak school I interviewed ten teachers and school club teachers about their notions on the need for media literacy in Slovak schools and the perceived influences of television on children. In the Hungarian school I only had a possibility to interview two school club teachers due to the already mentioned circumstances.

I tried to solicit some information also from parents of the children in the study. I circulated a letter among forty children in which I asked parents for their co-operation. There was, however, no response to my initiative. Despite this I was able to talk to five parents in the Slovak school.

EXERCISES

At the beginning of a focus group discussion (the size varied from four to seven, mixed gender) I introduced two exercises to the children. Each child was asked to mark what s/he watched on television the previous day on a television schedule that included

local channels (broadcasting in both Hungarian and Slovak) and Cartoon Network. I asked children to indicate on the sheet if they watched a programme on a channel that was not listed by me. The second exercise was a compilation of an ideal schedule. During this exercise I asked children to put together an ideal schedule for themselves, without regard to a specific channel or temporal aspects (times, day of the week etc.)⁵¹. I designed these two exercises in order to gain concrete information about children's favourite programmes and the languages in which they are broadcast. Obviously, the "yesterday's schedule exercise" is not entirely reliable (e.g. some children may mark a favourite programme although they did not watch it the previous day) but gives a general idea of the languages in which children watch television and a ground for comparison with what children say in focus group discussions and individual interviews. In the "ideal schedule" exercise children are likely to include favourite programmes (regardless of language in which these are broadcast) thus this is another means of acquiring information about the variety of languages that they watch television in.

FOCUS GROUPS

I decided to conduct focus group discussions with small groups of children as these provide rich material regarding a number of issues connected with television viewing that can be further explored in individual interviews. Issues that I intended to explore in focus group discussions concerned children's use of television, the context in which it happens, influence of parents and peers, social uses of television since I believe that these issues need to be understood in order to be able to move on to other crucial areas such as the recognition of cultural markers in various television programmes.

⁵¹ Some children's ideal schedule included only a list of programmes but there were also some that closely resembled a regular television schedule, indicating not only times but also the day on which the programmes should be broadcast.

Whom do you watch television with?

Do you all have siblings?

Does anyone bother you while you watch television?

And how do they bother you?

Do your parents forbid you to watch something on television?

What do they forbid you to watch?

Whom do you talk to about what you watched?

Do you have to ask your parents whether you can watch television?

How do you know that something on television is not taking place here in Slovakia?

You can give me examples.

So what do you think where were the X Files made?

But you are not allowed to watch the X Files?

We were filling out this schedule and from it I know that some of you watch Cartoon Network. Who watches Cartoon Network and what are your favourites?

What languages do you use at home? You all speak Slovak (Hungarian) at school, don't you?

And now I would like to ask you whether, according to you, it is important to know, to speak, foreign languages.

Which languages do you think are the most important for you?

Imagine that a Meego [a very popular hero of an American series, particularly popular

among the children attending the Slovak school] would appear here and he could grant you a wish that you could speak a language. Which one would you choose?

I also want to ask you about how you select television programmes.

Do you also watch video?

Do you also watch it at school?

What do you watch on video?

Do you have a favourite video tape?

Figure VI.1 Focus group questionnaire

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

I decided to use individual interviews in addition to the exercises and focus group discussions in order to get detailed and concrete accounts from children. The fact that individual interviews happen on a one-to-one basis gives more opportunity to children to develop their ideas and provide narratives about television programmes than focus group interviews. During the in-depth interviews I asked children about their favourite programmes, characters and episodes. I asked them to retell their favourite films or episodes of soaps or series. I also asked them to identify cultural markers in their favourite programmes and to come up with a new episode of a favourite soap, a sequence of a film or a completely new programme. I conducted these interviews in the school club, selecting mostly children who already took part in a focus group discussion, this, however, was not a prerequisite. I give examples of sample questions from an individual interview in Figure VI.2. Understandably there was more variety in questions during individual interviews than during focus groups.

Do you have a favourite film or series?

Which one?

Can you tell me about it? You can either tell me about an episode or in general what it is about.

Do you watch every episode?

What was the last one about?

Do you like some of its characters?

Which of the characters do you like most?

And why?

How do you know that it takes place in France?

What do you like most about Hercules as a series?

Do you have a favourite hero/ine?

Can you imagine that you were asked to make up a sequel of a film? For example if there is a film you liked and you were asked to come up with a sequel, what would it be like?

Figure VI.2 Sample questions from an individual interview

ADULT INTERVIEWS

With adults involved with the children, I have made informal interviews on relevant subjects, such as media literacy and possible changes in children's behaviour and cognitive skills that could be attributed to television influence. I asked teachers to comment on two questions. Comments on the question "Do you recognise changes in children's behaviour, knowledge of languages, general knowledge etc. that could be attributed to the influence of television?" are discussed in the findings of the study. The second question dealt with media literacy for young children and I do not discuss it in any depth in relation to this study.

I conducted some interviews with parents about their opinions on the influence of foreign languages on television on their children and possible restrictions that they would imply regarding watching television. Parents were asked to volunteer for these interviews but for a variety of reasons (mainly lack of co-operation on their part), few were finally willing to talk to me. The questionnaire for parents included four questions.

Do you think that the presence of many languages (Slovak, Hungarian, German, English etc.) on the television screen has an influence on your child/ren? What influence?

Do you try to influence your children regarding the language in which they watch television? If yes, in what ways?

What is your opinion about children watching television in a language that they do not understand or understand little?

Do you personally prefer to watch television in any language?

Figure VI.3 Questionnaire for interviews with parents

The whole project is treated as a case study as it aims at analytic generalisation (generalising theories) rather than a statistical one (enumerating frequencies).

FINDINGS

I outline the findings of the study in the following order: focus groups, individual interviews, yesterday's schedule exercise, teacher interviews and finally parent interviews. Each of the sections comprises of findings grouped under headings. These headings denote the most important issues explored. I compare the findings in the Slovak school with those in the Hungarian under each heading.

My discussion starts with focus groups since I believe that in order to explore the issues of children, media, language choice and ethnic identity one needs to acquire a thorough knowledge of children's actual uses of television. The areas covered in this section include individual and collective uses of television, interactions around television, parents' restrictions, selection of television programmes, cultural markers, languages television is watched in, languages spoken at home and the perceived importance of foreign languages.

The section on individual interviews develops some of the themes introduced in the first section. These include for example cultural markers and explore the issues of children's identification with television heroes/heroines and also concern children's viewing of violent programmes.

In the section dealing with yesterday's schedule exercise I discuss children's choices of programmes in respect of languages. This section provides supplementary data on the issues already discussed in the previous two sections.

The final two sections include findings on interviews with teachers and parents. I consider these important for at least two reasons. First, teachers and parents observe children's uses of television and often discuss these with them. Secondly, and equally importantly parents and teachers can play a role in influencing children's television viewing and language choice.

FOCUS GROUPS

Individual and collective uses of television

Family is the context in which children reported viewing television most in both schools. This category is followed by watching alone. In the Slovak school nine children mentioned a parent/s in the first place when asked about whom they watched

television with. The same number of children mentioned a sibling/s in the first place and alone was given as an answer in the first place by the same number of children. It is, however, impossible to categorise firmly the company in which children watch television. Rather, there is a lot of variety that depends on particular circumstances. As a girl says: "I watch mostly with my sister, sometimes with dad and also with sister, almost always with my sister. And if there's a good film we watch all together." A boy described whom he watches television with in this way: "When I come home from school [I watch television] alone and then in the evening with dad." Obviously, some children prefer to watch television alone while others claim they never watch alone, a boy says: "I mostly watch with mom and dad and sometimes I am also with Robko but not alone." Children make a distinction between a parent watching television with them or a parent being present in front of the screen but involved in a different activity, a girl reports: "Alone or my father reads the papers there." To this a boy reacts: "My father also does that sometimes and my mom joins us."

Watching television outside the home seems to occur mostly at grandparents' or when watching videos is involved. In the Slovak school children have the chance to watch videos at school; in fact, they can bring their own tapes with them. A variety of situations occurs with watching videos. A girl says: "Yes, sometimes [I watch video] when we borrow a VCR and tapes." A boy's answer reads: "Yes, here [at school] and then I was once at a friend's place and I watched Titanic with her."

The findings are similar in the Hungarian school. When asked whom they watched television with out of the twenty-one children fifteen mention a parent/s in the first place, three mention a sibling/s and three alone. But again company depends on the circumstances. A girl gives an elaborate answer: "With my mom, dad, with grandma and also grandpa. If I am at my cousins' then with my cousins, at my great grandma's

then with friends if I am at their place at a birthday party or at my mom's friends." A boy says: "Me also alone, with mom, dad, siblings." Another boy reports: "Well, me, I always watch alone. I send my parents away from the room." In the Hungarian school children also watch videos at school and similarly they watch television mostly at home rather than outside it.

Interactions around television

I asked children whom they talked to about what they watched on television. The three most often talked to groups included friends, parents and nobody. In the Slovak school out of the thirty children sixteen mentioned talking to friends about television programmes in the first place, eight mentioned parents, three siblings and two claim not to talk about television programmes to anyone. Some of the friends are schoolmates, a boy says: "With [male] classmates sometimes, of course during the breaks." Teachers also reported that children were often involved in media-related role play, a girl says: "Not a long time ago we were playing Acapulco." It turns out to be the case that they were "playing Acapulco" at school.

In the Hungarian school children reported similar habits. Eight out of the twenty-one mentioned parents at the first place, the same number mention friends, three claim not to talk to anyone about television programmes. A girl says: "We always talk with my [female] friend about what we've watched and what happened in it and whether she watched it or not and if she didn't watch it then we tell each other [what happened]." Another girl comments: "I always [talk to] my friend whether she watched it and so and my dad about what is on at *Frei dossier*. I always tell him to watch carefully and then tell me and similar things."

I want to emphasise that in both schools children would most of the time give gender specific friends i.e. they don't use the neutral terms friend/s but boys tend to say "male friends" and girls "female friends". There was not one case when a boy would say he talks about television programmes with a female friend or a girl say she talks to a male friend.

Parents' restrictions

It appears to be the case that television is used as a disciplining tool in a more or less consistent way in about one third of the cases. More or less means that a child may rarely be as nasty as to be forbidden to watch television. Children are punished by being forbidden to watch television for a variety of reasons. It can be grades. A boy says: "I am punished when I get at least one three (the grading scale is one to five with one being the best grade) and I am not allowed to watch television for a week, except the cartoons on RTL Klub.", nasty behaviour, a boy says: "It [being forbidden to watch something on television] happened once because we were quarrelling when we had a computer then once we, we were playing on it and we were quarrelling and we spoilt the computer a bit and that is why we couldn't [watch television]. Because we erased something." A boy touches upon the question of length of punishment in the form of being forbidden to watch television: "They sometimes don't allow me to watch television when I'm not obedient. ... It depends on how disobedient I am, if I am very disobedient it can even be ten days." A boy reports not being allowed to watch television at lunch time: "Me also because if we are to have lunch the television always attracts me."

A punishment can however have a different form which is by many children perceived to be more severe than not being allowed to watch television. A girls says her

parents do not punish her by not allowing her to watch television, instead "they do not give me pocket money. For a week and they do not buy me anything for a month."

Parents do not allow children to watch television because of the content of television programmes. For example many children talked about *X Files* as an exciting programme they would like to watch, yet in the large majority of cases parents do not allow them to do so. Watching evening programmes (usually after 8 p.m. though Friday and Saturday are most of the time exceptions as there is no school the next day) is also regulated by parents as well as watching television at times when children have other duties to perform (for example time to do homework). A girl's answer to the question about what she is not allowed to watch on television: "All sorts of things, anything that is on after 8 p.m. Only if it is a comedy I am allowed to watch it." A boy answers to my question about when he goes to bed: "Sometimes 8:30 p.m., sometimes 9 p.m. Sometimes if there is a good comedy on even at 9:30. It depends." A girl answers to my question about what she is not allowed to watch: "It's *X Files* and *Első csók* because I have to do my homework and study."

Children very rarely report that they permanently need to ask for permission to switch the television on. More often the practice varies. A boy reports: "I have to ask [when I want to switch the television on] because we have a rule "sixteen times television a week" so I can't just switch the television on." A girl says: "I only need to ask [for permission to switch the television on] in the evening. They even gave me a television." Another girl says: "I also do not need to ask throughout the day but I need to in the evening." A girl says she only needs to ask for a permission "when mom is not at home and we are alone with my sister". A boy says: "I switch it on and ask only afterwards."

The patterns of parents' restrictions on children's television viewing that came up in the Hungarian school are remarkably similar to those given in the Slovak school.

The reasons for being punished in this way include grades. For example a girl reports: "When I bring a bad grade from school or when I study.", behaviour, for example a boy says he is not allowed to watch television "when I am disobedient. ... Then always. For a whole day". Another boy says: "I when I bring a black dot (black and red dots are used to assess behaviour) then I cannot watch for a week." This form of punishment is applied for various lengths of time. Some parents use other forms of punishment, a girl says: "They don't allow me to do what I like most. ... Well, if I wanted to go out to slide most of all then they don't allow me to do that." Violent content of programmes is a reason for parents to forbid their watching. A girl says: "I when there are such films in which there are UFOs and similar ones and horrors, these [I watch] not much, I don't like to watch them." Another girl says: "*X Files* and ones with blood. And then those with monsters." A girl terms films she is not allowed to watch "those that are for adults, for example *X Files* and similar".

Similarly to the Slovak school children at the Hungarian school normally do not need permission to switch the television on rather it depends on circumstances. A boy says: "For me it is that I switch it on or I ask and switch it on." A girl comments: "I sometimes [need to ask for permission to switch the television on] when my week of punishment is over." A boy says: "I ask when I have already switched the television on." Another girl says: "Late at night."

Selection of television programmes

Children talk about five most important ways in which they find out about television programmes: newspapers, teletext, hearsay, switching channels and

advertisements about future programmes on the various channels. The extent to which children feel comfortable about using teletext surprised me. This may illustrate the readiness with which children incorporate the use of new technologies/equipment etc. in their lives. At the Slovak school a boy says: "I sometimes use teletext and also newspapers." Another boy comments: "I switch channels and have a look at what [will be on] and I do the same thing in the evening." It is likely that children often acquire information from a variety of sources, as this girl describes: "When I have the television switched on they show what will be on later. Then I learn from somebody or we have a magazine from which you can learn, I read them and then I know." Some children show particular habits regarding the selection of programmes, a boy reports: "I don't look anywhere I know it by heart. I put everything down, I always re-write what is in the papers. I don't tell anyone, not even my parents and then I tell mom when there is a good film on for her."

The selection of programmes happens in a similar way among children from the Hungarian school. A girl reports: "I usually use the teletext regarding what is on when and I always make notes on that and then I know." Combinations of different methods occur as well, a girl says: "I always [use] the teletext on my parents' television because it is separate in the children's room and in the living room and then in the papers and in places like that." Another girl says she usually looks at the papers or "I ask my mom if I can't find out where the papers are". Different habits are also reflected, similarly to the Slovak school, a boy comments: "I set the alarm clock so that it goes off, before that I check when it is on in the papers."

Cultural markers

It is important to note that all programmes on Slovak and Hungarian television channels are dubbed. The exception is programmes in minority languages which are with subtitles and foreign language courses. Therefore I asked children how they knew that something on television was taking place elsewhere than in Slovakia and/or Hungary. Answers to this question could be divided into a number of categories. Most children give visual characteristics such as different surroundings and clothes; nature would also come up often. A girl answers: "I think it is because if something takes place somewhere else the decoration is different." A girl comments in this way: "I saw *Saving Private Ryan* and *Save Willy* and *Saving Private Ryan* could not have taken place here because there is not a huge war here like there and *Save Willy* because there are no whales here neither a sea and those [whales] were live ones." A boy argues in a different vein: "Because ... I know it because when *Rex* is on that can really happen but not here because we don't have such police co-operation and also because of the sea and ..."

Children also check where the film was made in the papers, on teletext or at the beginning of the film (which company presents it). A boy says: "We have teletext on television and I always have a look at where that film comes from." Another boy says: "I know it because when I'm choosing a programme [from the papers] it is written there." A girl states: "I have a look at the papers." A boy comments: "Or sometimes there is a Czech comedy and ČR [Czech Republic] is written there."

Among other cultural markers were different currencies, as well as actors who are not Slovak, dubbing, people speaking other languages than the ones spoken in Slovakia were also given. A girl says: "According to, I only know according to the fact that they sometimes speak a different language." A boy characterises dubbing in this

way: "Because they speak a different language there and then they translate it." A boy answers combining different characteristics: "When they say how much they are going to give to him. Whether in dollars or ... According to the actors. ... It cannot take place anywhere that a space craft fall son the earth. That cannot take place anywhere." In fact, a separate category can be made up of films that are totally fictional, that could not take place anywhere (such as UFO landings, *X Files*, some horror films etc.).

Findings in the Hungarian school show a great deal of similarity to those in the Slovak school. In the Hungarian school children gave similar characteristics as those in the Slovak school but one important difference occurred in how frequently dubbing came up as a characteristic. In the Slovak school the issue came up once while in the Hungarian school three times. Perhaps more remarkable than the difference in frequency is the fact that children in the Hungarian school seem to have a more thorough knowledge of how dubbing manifests itself. Among the issues connected with dubbing the following were mentioned: "wrong" movement of lips, speaking in silence, or still moving the lips while not saying anything in Hungarian, as well as the overheard foreign language. A boy says: "I know because they dub them. Because I realise that they speak, they speak Hungarian, while he had already said that in English and he said it then [in Hungarian] with his lips closed." A girl comments: "According to their speaking in silence and also to their lip movements. ... And they say it later in Hungarian. ... And there are things said that you can hear in the silence." Another girl describes the overheard other language in this way: "I know from the fact that they speak a different language like it is usually in *Fókusz* that they, for example, go to England and they say it there."

The other mentioned areas were the same as in the Slovak school: different buildings, surroundings and nature. A boy says: "There are different clothes than in

Slovakia and Hungary. And also there are palm trees. And sea, and we only have the Danube." Another boy argues: "Because there are different surroundings, people are also different, oceans." A girl says: "In my opinion also because there are such castles." Other issues involve knowing from the titles of a film, speaking a different language and the utterly fictional character of some programmes. A girl says: "Because when a film begins they say where it was made." A girl comments: "And also there is a difference because in other countries those are different and they also speak different languages and here we speak Hungarian."

Languages television is watched in

Foreign languages

When asked about television channels broadcasting in non-local languages, in the Slovak school English prevailed with Cartoon Network as a favourite. In each focus group there were children who watch it, this becomes clearer in the section in which I analyse the outcomes of the exercise with the schedule of programmes broadcast the previous day when I comment in more depth on language combinations that came up during discussions with children. English was followed by German, music channels such as Viva and children's channels such as Super RTL were mentioned by children.

In the Hungarian school three children reported watching Cartoon Network during the focus group discussions. However, the analysis of the exercise with the previous day's schedule reveals that more children watch Cartoon Network in the Hungarian school.

Local languages

The large majority of children in the Slovak school watch television in both Slovak and Hungarian; out of the thirty children who took part in focus group discussions only eight reported not watching anything in Hungarian.

When discussing questions of children's belonging to one or the other ethnic group, the term ethnicity was actually used by a child only once. More often, children would comment on languages that they use or those that are used at home. Children would also characterise themselves, relatives and friends as being Hungarian or Slovak without using the term ethnicity.

The situation in the Hungarian school differs significantly in terms of watching television in local languages. When asked about the language children watch television in "mostly," all the children answered Hungarian. When explicitly asked whether they watched television in Slovak ten answered "no" and further three "rather no". The answers of children who said yes indicated that even in their cases the amount of time they spent watching in Slovak was not comparable to that in Hungarian, they would watch the news with parents in Slovak, favourite cartoons, occasionally films.

Obviously, the amount of television watched in Slovak is not comparable to that watched by children (speakers of Hungarian and Slovak) in the Slovak school. This is clear not only from the focus group discussions but also from the other exercises.

Similarly to the children in the Slovak school the children in the Hungarian school also referred to language use or "being Hungarian," rather than using the term ethnicity.

Importance of foreign languages

All the children interviewed in the Slovak school said it was important to speak foreign languages. Reasons for this could be grouped into different areas, the most

prominent among them travelling abroad and being able to communicate abroad as well as with foreigners at home. A girl says: "I always wanted to learn English but my parents have told me that it would be better if I learned German, for example if we went to Germany I could communicate there." A boy comments: "So that we can communicate." Another boy argues: "Because if somebody comes and asks you and the person does not speak Slovak or Czech⁵² then you need to speak [foreign] languages." A boy says it is important for him to learn German because "I'll go to Germany". A boy argues: "If we want to buy something in a foreign country we are not able to say what we want." Another boy says: "I think it is because if somebody comes [to Slovakia] from Hungary so that we can communicate."

Other reasons for speaking foreign languages were less frequent and they included marrying a foreigner and a future job. A girl claims that it is important for her to speak foreign languages "because I will be a stewardess". I would like to note here that among the reasons watching television in a foreign language, reading books, papers in foreign languages or understanding popular songs, never came up. It also became clear during the discussion that the majority of children in the Slovak school learn foreign languages, either at school or take private classes of English or German.

Similarly to their counterparts in the Slovak school, children in the Hungarian school unanimously agreed that it was important to speak foreign languages. Their reasons are very similar to those presented by children in the Slovak school. The first group of reasons has to do with travelling abroad and being able to communicate abroad as well as with foreigners at home. A boy says: "If we go on a trip somewhere to those foreign language what's its name so that we can also talk to somebody else." A girl describes the same reason in this way: "Well, if we go somewhere else where they

⁵² Slovak and Czech are mutually understandable on the level of simple everyday

speak a different language so that we can talk to them." Another girl argues: "So that we don't only speak Hungarian but also other languages and also so that we can travel to far-away countries not just in Párkány⁵³." One aspect of speaking a foreign language abroad is expressed by the same girl: "I wouldn't be able to exchange money." A different reason for speaking foreign languages is, as a boy says, "because of the computer".

An interesting feature of this part of focus group discussions is that one boy talked about the importance of speaking Slovak and later Slovak would come up as one of the languages these children would like to learn and considered most important. This perhaps reflects the children's ambiguous relationship to Slovak. They understand Hungarian as their mother tongue but characterise Slovak as something between a mother tongue and a foreign language.

In the same way as in the Slovak school watching television in a foreign language, reading books, papers in foreign languages, understanding popular songs, did not occur as an answer. And also similarly to the Slovak school these children learn English or German as a foreign language.

Most important languages

I have asked children which language/s they considered most important and why. Some children gave more than one language as an answer and their answer sometimes correspond to the language they are already learning. In the Slovak school English or German scored fourteen votes, Slovak nine, Slovak and Hungarian, both languages given together as most important, came up five times. Native tongue, French and Czech each came up once. English or German were given without further reasons while local

conversation.

languages were considered most important because these reflected the realities of children's lives best in terms of languages. A girl says: "Slovak and Hungarian because I live here and my grandmother also [lives here]." Another girl argues in a similar vein: "Slovak because I live in Slovakia." To which another girl adds: "Also Slovak but also the other ones are important." A boy says: "Slovak, Hungarian and Czech that would be best." The languages that parents used to learn can be also particularly attractive for the children, a boy considers French the most important language "because my father also used to take French classes".

In the Hungarian school English was given fifteen votes as the most important language, followed by Slovak with thirteen, Hungarian with eight, German with seven, Japanese with three and mother tongue, French, Romany and Russian each with one. A boy says: "Slovak ... because we live here." The same boy goes on to argue that most important are "Hungarian, Slovak and English. ... Because we have to speak Hungarian in any case and also Slovak and if we go somewhere then English also if we go somewhere abroad." Another boy argues: "Our mother tongue so that we can speak." A girl argues: "According to me Slovak [is the most important one] here but if we, say, lived in England then it would be English." A boy argues that English is the most important language as "the majority of people speak that".

Languages children would like to speak

I have asked children which language they would like to speak if they could learn without any effort, by magic. In the Slovak school twelve children gave English among the languages they would like to speak, eight would like to speak all languages, seven chose German, three Czech and Russian. Hungarian, Italian, Chinese, French and

⁵³ The Hungarian equivalent of Štúrovo.

"Brazilian" were given one vote each. Reasons for these choices vary from utilitarian, such as using the language abroad, to more emotional ones, such as wanting to speak a given language because one's parents used to speak it or used to live in the given country. A boy would like to speak Russian because "my father used to work in Russia". Other relatives can be equally important in relation to children's reasoning. A boy says: "I [would like to speak] Czech because my cousin lives there." Another boy says he would like to speak Hungarian "because my father speaks it as well and I could teach my brother". A girl gives her reasons in the following answer: "I like it [English]." Another girl argues that she would like to speak English "because if I have a husband who lives in England so that I can also speak English. Or if he moved here". A girl would like to speak all languages "because if someone asks me about something I can then answer in that language". A boy adds: "You can talk to everybody."

In the Hungarian school English was given ten times as the language children would like to speak. German, French, Russian and Hungarian were each given three times, Slovak twice, Chinese and all languages once. Children gave similar reasons to those given in the Slovak school. For example, a girl would like to speak Russian "because my mother used to learn Russian". A boy would like to speak French "because if it were possible [for him to speak French] then I would go there because my father took me there once already".

Languages spoken at home

In the Slovak school out of the thirty children who took part in the focus groups nine children reported speaking only Slovak at home. Four children claimed to use only Hungarian at home, the rest use both languages at home. The situation differed significantly in the Hungarian school. Out of the twenty-one children one child reported

speaking both Slovak and Hungarian at home. Two said they sometimes spoke Slovak at home, one spoke Slovak "not much" at home and one reported speaking Slovak at home only when getting ready for classes of Slovak. The remaining sixteen children claim to speak exclusively Hungarian⁵⁴ at home.

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

Individual interviews constitute a rich fabric of material concerning children's television viewing habits as well as their notions on a large number of issues. In order to make an analysis of individual interviews meaningful and fruitful in terms of the relationship between language use and media I have decided to concentrate on four major areas: narratives about programmes broadcast in foreign languages or to be more precise children's accounts are about a particular foreign language, English, children's description of cultural markers, identification with characters and a brief discussion of children's viewing of "violent programmes".

In the individual interviews I have asked children about their favourite programmes, accounts of episodes or films, favourite heroes and those they would like to resemble and in what ways as well as new episodes, sequels or brand new films that they would like to see on television. In the Slovak school eighteen children (twelve girls and six boys) took part in the interviews compared to thirteen (three girls and ten boys) in the Hungarian school. Although I would have preferred to control the sample in the Hungarian school in gender terms more but this was impossible due to children's willingness (or rather unwillingness) to take part in individual interviews.

I use children's narratives which in some cases emerged more powerfully than in others as sources of information about children's understanding of cultural and social realities presented in various television programmes. Children's understanding of the realities of their own lives was, however, also reflected in their narratives.

In this section I give examples from interviews conducted in both schools by category. Although children's accounts are very similar in both schools, the most remarkable and decisive difference occurs in terms of languages that favourite programmes are broadcast in. While in the Slovak school favourite programmes in Slovak, Hungarian and English appear, in the Hungarian school the Slovak element is missing. I discuss briefly children's "liking" of television violence since this area seems to be of particular concern to teachers and parents. Differences have occurred among the children in terms of their ability to give coherent narratives of what they watched on television but also in terms of ideas regarding sequels/new episodes/new films. Some children dismissed my question about their ability to come up with a new episode/sequel/new film outright. Others came up with a number of ideas, some of them in-depth, others rather sketchy.

Children in both schools do not make a clear distinction between film, soap, serial and series. When asked about a film they would often give me an episode of a soap as an example. Children would often claim they watch every episode of their favourite series/soap but when I asked them about the episode broadcast the previous day it became clear that they had not watched it or had watched only part of the episode. However, on the other hand, a girl told me she cried when she missed an episode of her favourite cartoon *Sailor Moon*.

⁵⁴ In one case a boy reported that his parents would speak Slovak together if they did not

Foreign language favourites

Cartoon Network proves to be children's favourite channel broadcasting in a language other than the local ones. Children report watching *Mask*, *Batman*, *Tom & Jerry* and *Taz-mania*. Children who watch these programmes show no concern about language problems, rather cartoons on Cartoon Network are popular because of their regularity and frequency. I discussed the cartoon *Taz-mania* with one of the boys in the Slovak school: "There is a bit bigger animal than a wolf and always when he shouts all the animals run away because they are all afraid of him that he would eat them because he eats everything. ... It [the animal] has thin arms, big body and thin legs.... And then he eats when he finds food but he never does. ... From time to time he sometimes finds food." One boy has summarised his preference for *Batman* on Cartoon Network in this way: "I like the cartoon more because it is on every day ... on Cartoon [Network]."

During the discussions about children's favourites it has become clear that apart from soaps/series/serials children like watching particular cartoons. On the Hungarian channel RTL Klub two French-made cartoons that are broadcast in Hungarian are hugely popular among children in both schools. The two cartoons, *Dragon Ball* and *Sailor Moon*, could also be termed "cartoon series" as they have a large number of episodes that revolve around the same set of characters. Both are about fighting evil and protecting the earth from evil forces. *Sailor Moon* is about a group of five girls while *Dragon Ball* has in the centre Shongoku and his son who together with friends fight in order to protect magic crystals. A girl describes the cartoon *Sailor Moon* and a particular episode in this way:

It is about five fairies and they, if evil appears, they transform and they then protect the city. And there are two kittens who were transformed in such a way that they become fairies. ... It happened that Sailor Moon liked one of the boys very much

want the children to understand.

and then there was such, such a big tree which was from the Empire of the Dark and then that Sailor Moon a sculpture, well, there was a sculpture and Sailor Moon was curious about it and she looked into it and the big tree pulled her in and then Bordue wanted to save her and he couldn't because very much, he couldn't save her because the tree also pulled him. And they couldn't free themselves and then came the other three fairies and then they freed them but at first their magic did not succeed and then it did.

Cultural markers

Descriptions of characteristics that tell children about the country of origin of a particular programme continue in the individual interviews in the way they began in focus group discussions. The explanations and examples are more concrete yet it is still visual characteristics that prevail. Children, however, in the concrete instances compare the cultural reality presented in the programme with that of their own milieu or other cultures they "know". A girl argues that she knows her favourite soap for teenagers is French "because there are all sorts of names that aren't in England or anywhere else". Another girl compares the wedding she saw on television in the American series *JAG* with a wedding that she went to: "There were different things because when there were all the swords crossing and then there were different rings and all that, those military rings and then there was a different priest and different chairs."

Identification

Children make a clear distinction between heroes/characters they like and whom they would like to resemble. Gender differences are marked, girls may admire male heroes but they would not like to be like them since they are not of the corresponding gender. The same applies to boys, although a boy may admire Xena he would not like to be like her. A girl says she would not want to be like Meego (a hero of an American

series broadcast on the Slovak channel Markíza who has, possibly because of being an alien, been extremely popular among the children at the Slovak school⁵⁵) "because I am not a boy". However, had there been a female Meega⁵⁶ she would not object to being like her. A boy acknowledges that "Xena is better than Hercules" yet he would not like to be like her because "I don't want to be a girl ... because it is not the best thing".

Although identification with a character of the same gender is evident, it is by no means a rule. For example, a boy says he would like to resemble Xena, "well, because she jumps, she jumps high and then kicks off the man's head". Or a girl says she would like to be like

Xena as "she is strong, has a nice sword and that whirling thing" but she also

acknowledges that she has another favourite, Hercules, whom she would like to resemble as well.

In most cases children would like to resemble strong heroes who are able to fight regardless of the children's gender. These heroes most frequently include Hercules and Xena, of the cartoon ones the already mentioned Sailor Moon and Shongoku. They would like to be able to fight like them but would use their ability only to protect themselves and others. Typical answers include: "I'm learning to fight from it." "If somebody evil wanted to fight, I would beat him." "[I like Xena] because she can fight well." A boy says he would like to be like Hercules "very very very much ... in order to fight". There are, nonetheless, children who would like to try fighting for the "feel of

⁵⁵ To my great surprise he was virtually unknown in the Hungarian school. I believe this was largely due to difficulties in understanding Slovak rather than genre or the availability of other similar programmes in Hungarian.

⁵⁶ In Slovak the suffix -a marks feminine names while -o masculine ones.

it". A girl says she would like to fight evil and apart from that try "what it would be like, what a pleasant feeling, I could kick and could do all sorts of things".

Children, in many cases, combine different heroes for an imagined film/sequel.

A girl says she would like to have Hercules and Xena in one film, "it would be like like like Xena would have some more [female] friends and she and Hercules would be enemies and not always kissing but they would be enemies and there would be an army confronting her, all in all Hercules and Xena in one serial". However, they should not be in love "because then everything is love and I just don't like films like that. ... I would make some [films] without love. Because then it is about nothing if all the series are about love". Another girl says: "I would come up with something like ... Batman and Superman would fight against each other and then one of them would die." Yet another girl would like to combine Hercules and Sailor Moon: "They would fight then they [the fairies] would grab Hercules and lift him and then throw him away."

Apart from Hercules and Xena, Shongoku and Sailor Moon some children identify with less obviously "violent characters" such as policemen (a boy says "because he [Inspector Prakter] is able to catch everybody"), care givers or cunning cartoon characters. A girl says: "My most favourite actress is the one from Alf ... the girl, the daughter ... because she takes care of the young boy. ... That she takes care when mom is not at home but I also like Alf, he also takes care of him." A boy would like to resemble Charles Ingalls from the American series *Little House on the Prairie* because "he tried to help with everything and he was very good-hearted." A girl would like to resemble Jerry "because he always plays tricks on the cat" and she would like to fool her dad. A boy would like to resemble Pumuckli, a small elf from a German-Hungarian series for children "because he is invisible and small and he can move through a mouse hole".

I have devoted a larger section of this part to children's identification with "violent characters" yet, as I argue in the following section, it is not my intention to discuss possible effects of such identification nor am I arguing that children identify with these characters only because of their strength and ability to fight. Rather I try to suggest that children do not identify with heroes/heroines from locally made programmes; not a single one of the heroes/heroines mentioned in the individual interviews is a "local" one. In other words children for a variety of reasons (among them availability and attractiveness) do not like locally made programmes as much as they do foreign ones and they do not identify with "locally imagined" heroes/heroines. This is partly due to the fact that there are no locally made series/soaps/serials comparable to children's favourite programmes. This globalising influence can have an impact on children's understanding of cultural/national/ethnic identities. I have already discussed possible influences of globalisation on the perception of national identity/ies and I return to the topic in the final section of this chapter.

Children and violence

In the previous section I have given examples of children's identification with "violent characters". Although these characters are heroes/heroines who protect the world from evil and fight for other noble causes the fact that they are successful because of mastering fighting seems to stir up a lot of concern among teachers and parents, as I demonstrate later in this chapter.

Children seem to be very perceptive of the details of fights and moves that these heroes/heroines make. It is probably true that a significant shift has occurred in the way heroes are conceived in contemporary programmes for children if compared to those broadcast a decade ago. It became clear during my interviews with teachers in the

Slovak school that the amount of violence on the television screen is of major concern to them and they perceive it as one of the forces that lead to changes in children's behaviour when compared with children a decade or so ago. This research project is not aimed at dealing in particular with children's interest and identification with "violent characters" yet I believe some comments, however brief, need to be made.

Although the majority of children may like heroes who are strong and able fighters, not all of them identify with such heroes. Moreover children are aware that, as a boy put it to me, "it is just a game" on the television screen. For many children the appeal of characters such as Xena and Hercules does not lie in their ability to fight but rather concerns, for example, their looks. Other children claim to want to be like those fighting heroes yet at the same time they also identify with heroes whose characteristics have little to do with violence. For example, a boy would like to fight like Batman and to be like Jerry and do all those cunning tricks. There are other characteristics apart from the ability to fight that children appreciate very much, among these they mention "funny" and "interesting", for example, in relation to series like *Alf*, *Meego* and *Time Trax*.

I have also talked to children who constantly show what one could term a "pacific" attitude. The way in which a boy imagines the sequel of the film *Interview with a Vampire* is typical of his answers: "That they [people] would catch fifty, eighty thousand [vampires] from all around the world and they would all be together in a forest and they wouldn't feed on human blood but on animal blood. That they wouldn't kill, only animals." One of his favourite characters is "Robin Hood because he was good and he didn't kill people".

There certainly are a number of other issues that were revealed during the focus group discussions and individual interviews and relate to the question of violence on

television screens. These, however, are not of major concern to this study. Yet, I believe, violence on television and its perceived effects on children will in the near future become a major element in the public debate in Slovakia.

YESTERDAY'S SCHEDULE EXERCISE

In this exercise I have prepared the previous day's television schedule for children and asked them to mark the programmes they watched. The television channels included in the schedule are all available in local languages in the town and in addition I listed the schedule of Cartoon Network. I did not include other satellite and cable channels because the pilot study has already suggested that those were not widely watched by children. Instead, I asked children to add any other programmes that they watched and were not included in the schedule.

The "mark what you watched yesterday" exercise can be helpful in finding out what children actually watched the previous day as opposed to the broader topic of what they like to watch. However, this exercise is in no way absolutely reliable as some children would mark programmes they could not watch the previous day (e.g. because they were at school at the time) but that perhaps belong among their favourites. On the other hand it is also very likely that a child does not every day watch all the television channels that s/he watches in general. This is clear from cases of children who have only marked programmes in Slovak but would talk about programmes on Hungarian channels either during the focus groups or the individual interviews. Despite these shortcomings there certainly are advantages to this exercise. One of the remarkable findings is that although only three children from the Hungarian school reported watching Cartoon Network during focus group discussions in the schedule, seven children marked Cartoon Network programmes.

The language combinations that appear on children's schedules differ significantly for both schools. In the Slovak school four combinations of channels appeared in terms of languages: Slovak; Slovak and English (Cartoon Network); Slovak and Hungarian; Slovak, Hungarian and English (Cartoon Network). Other combinations such as Hungarian only or Hungarian and English (Cartoon Network) did not occur. Fourteen children marked programmes broadcast only in Slovak, eight marked Slovak and Hungarian, four Slovak and English (Cartoon Network) and four marked Slovak, Hungarian and English (Cartoon Network).

In the Hungarian school the number of combinations that appear is three, namely Hungarian; Hungarian and English (Cartoon Network) and Slovak and Hungarian. Thirteen children marked only programmes broadcast in Hungarian. Seven children marked Hungarian and English (Cartoon Network) and one child marked Slovak and Hungarian. This is a further indication of the remarkable difference in terms of watching television in local languages that occurs between the children in the two schools. I discuss this issue in more depth in the final section of this chapter.

TEACHER INTERVIEWS

I have interviewed three teachers and seven school club teachers in the Slovak school, the regular teachers were at the time teaching second-graders⁵⁷. I have asked

⁵⁷ At the time there were four second-grade classes; one of the teachers was ill thus I did not include her in the interviews. Three of the school club teachers were in school clubs for second-graders, the fourth school club teacher active in the second grade refused to take part in an interview. The remaining school club teachers were active in first or third grades and they all knew the second-graders I interviewed since those were in their care the previous year. All the interviewed teachers and school club teachers are female. In general there is a great discrepancy between the number of women and men working as either regular teachers or school club teachers.

them whether they perceive changes in children's behaviour, knowledge of languages, general knowledge etc. that could be attributed to the influence of television. All the interviewed teachers acknowledge that children nowadays are more exposed to the influence of the media than previous generations and that they are more perceptive and have greater knowledge than previous generations of children of the same age. All of the interviewed teachers mentioned that children often watch programmes that were intended for adults and that parents should play a more active role in controlling children's choice of television programmes.

Out of the ten interviewed teachers, two stressed that television could have both positive and negative effects. One of them argued that the influence of television could be very positive on language learning and that children want to discuss what they watch on television but there is not much chance to do that at school because of the pressure of curriculum. She also argued that children were very creative, they came up with sequels of different television programmes. The other teacher who acknowledges both positive and negative influences of television viewing on children says: "I perceive changes in the sense that nowadays children are more perceptive of outer stimuli, they show a wide range of interest in current events. They select programmes that they are interested in."

The remaining eight teachers have all stressed that children's behaviour has become more aggressive due to television influence. One teacher comments: "Children are themselves not able to select programmes that are appropriate for their age and it often happens that they watch films, action and martial ones, which do not have a positive effect on them. Negative effects manifest themselves primarily in children's behaviour. They try out different blows on their friends, fight in the way they saw it in a film while they do not realise possible consequences of their behaviour." Another teacher comments: "In behaviour the influence of television reflects itself in

aggressiveness. Children fight among themselves, a neutral observer must see it as fighting although they [the children] claim they are only playing." Yet another teacher comments in this way: "The influence of television is very much reflected in children's behaviour. Children like to imitate aggressive heroes of cartoons and they often hurt each other. This is not surprising as such behaviour "bombards" them from the television screen when they watch action cartoons every day."

Two teachers also commented on the perceived influence of television on children's understanding of sexuality and intimacy apart from the aggressiveness. One of the teachers comments in this way: "Television certainly has negative influence on children's behaviour, their games are about fighting and aggressiveness. But there is also an influence on their understanding of sexuality, one can identify what children watched on television the previous evening, they are excited about that." She went on to tell me a story of two third-graders who got "engaged" in their first grade and ever since then walk together during the breaks and exchange "kisses". Some teachers commented on the characteristics of heroes that they perceived as negative or evil: " In today's cartoons and fairy tales evil prevails. The evil character is very evil but the hero is also made positive by characteristics such as strength and power and the ability to fight. There has always been evil in fairy tales but it used to be more subtle... I have heard an argument that children have to learn about evil and maybe this happens through fairy tales but I still think that there is just too much evil in them these days."

Most teachers, as I have already suggested, link the changes in children's behaviour in an indirect way also to the family context, i.e. parents should exercise more control over children's selection of television programmes, should spend more time with children watching television and actually discussing television programmes. Two teachers in particular went even further and linked changes in children's behaviour to

television and to changes occurring in child-parent relationships and subsequent changes in the atmosphere of kindergartens. A teacher comments: "Families have changed. The parent - child relationship is friendly rather than dominant. We, school club teachers, see it all the time, for example, when parents come to pick up their children, children do not obey them. This also gets reflected at school, children behave in the same way to teachers and school club teachers. ... There is no longer healthy competition among children, rather it has become pathological." Another teacher argues: "The "American ways" that have gained ground in kindergartens also have their influence on children's behaviour. In the kindergarten a child can say what s/he wants or does not want to do, this means that children do not learn how to behave at school. Also, their attention is scattered, it is impossible to read a fairy tale to them, they cannot concentrate on it. It is also difficult to go for a walk with them, they get bored soon and cannot behave themselves."

In terms of television influence on children's learning of languages the prevalent view seems to be that children can learn pronunciation but watching television in foreign languages does not have a direct influence on their knowledge of the language. A teacher argues: "Children are happy when they are learning vocabulary at school and they notice a familiar word that they know from a cartoon. They learn the pronunciation but they do not learn a language directly from television viewing." Some teachers believe television does not have influence on children's knowledge of foreign languages. "The knowledge of foreign languages at this age can be attributed to teaching at schools, in private and other forms of teaching." Six out of the ten interviewed teachers did not, however, comment on the relationship between television influence and language learning.

PARENT INTERVIEWS

Although this project concentrates on children and was not intended to explore the family context of television viewing I have used the opportunity to talk to some of the parents when they came to pick up their children from the school clubs. I was able to talk to five parents in the Slovak school⁵⁸. The questions that I wanted them to comment on concerned the influence of the variety of languages present on the television screen on children, parents' influence on children's choice of languages that they watch television in, parents' opinions about children watching television in a language that they do not understand and finally parents' preferences regarding watching television in a particular language.

Parents think the presence of many languages on the television screen is positive/largely positive or unproblematic. One parent comments in this way: "The influence is positive. I can see it with my daughter, she's been already learning German in the kindergarten." A mother comments: "The influence is largely positive. There's no problem with the presence of many languages on television rather the problem is that there is no Czech on television." Another mother says: "I don't think it is a problem. Dušan has always been very conscientious, he has tried to learn languages. He now attends English classes. Watching something in English can help him learn." Two parents show a more cautious attitude: "I'm not sure. I have two sons, one of them takes English classes. Watching television in English helps them to learn how to pronounce things correctly but not to learn English." And a mother comments: "She watches Slovak, Hungarian as well as German channels, like RTL2. I didn't really recognise any

⁵⁸ I have not encountered any parents in the Hungarian school. I was not able to spend as much time in the Hungarian school as in the Slovak one due to teachers' anxiety.

changes, she's started learning German recently but no, I can't see a difference [in terms of her increased vocabulary etc.] She also watches Cartoon Network."

All the parents claim they do not try to influence their children's choice regarding watching television in a particular language. A father argues: "No. Even if I tried to tell him what to watch he wouldn't do that. He has his own preferences, makes his own choices and watches whatever he wants in whatever language he chooses." A mother says: "No. It doesn't matter in which languages he watches, the main thing is that he watches a meaningful film." Another mother comments: "No. But we mainly watch in Slovak and Hungarian, in languages we understand. He watches Cartoon Network sometimes but we don't make selections for him." Or as another mother puts it: "No. She watches whatever she chooses and she watches in different languages."

Parents do not attribute much importance to the fact that children do not understand the language in which they watch television programmes. A mother argues: "Even if he doesn't understand everything, if he watches something in English, I think he can understand according to the motions and similar things, I think. It is perhaps worse with programmes in Slovak when there are swear words, which these days is quite normal and he learns those easily." Another mother argues: "I don't think it really matters. If it doesn't matter to the children I don't think it should bother me."

In terms of language preferences demonstrated by the parents themselves, they claim that they mostly tend to watch Hungarian and Slovak programmes, as a mother says: "We mostly watch in Slovak and Hungarian which we understand perfectly." A father says he does not watch television programmes in foreign languages most of the time "except sports. There are a lot of channels in Hungarian and Slovak, about eight or nine. One can select enough programmes from those, you don't even have time to

watch all that you choose. I don't watch in German or English anything except sports, I don't feel like that".

DISCUSSION

The findings of my research regarding children's use of television are comparable to those of a cross-cultural project "Children, Young People and the Changing Media Environment"⁵⁹ directed by S. Livingstone and G. Gaskell. One of the main aims of this project is to explore the use of new and old media by children and adolescents. The similarities of findings are apparent in a number of areas out of which I discuss individual and collective uses of television, interactions around television, peers' influence on television use and parents' restrictions regarding television use.

Research conducted by Pasquier et al. (1998) shows that children's media use still remains a shared experience with other members of the family. I can draw the same conclusion from my research. Television viewing mostly occurs at home in a family context, sometimes as an individual experience. Very few children claim to have a television set in their bedrooms, rather they watch television without their parents (either alone or with a sibling/s) at particular times of the day. Children in my sample in both schools rarely have the chance to watch television with their friends. Such occasions sometimes occur and they tend to involve watching videos. Apart from home children also watch television at relatives' places (such as grandparents), at school and occasionally at friends' places.

My research also suggests that talk about television programmes and media-related role play do occur in this age group. Although, as I have already suggested,

children have few opportunities to view television programmes together with their peers, social interactions around television do occur after use. As Suess et al. argue: "Even though television is used mostly at home, either alone or in the company of parents or siblings, it is important in children's and teenagers' relationships with their peers. But social uses in the peer group context mostly take place only after the use, not in the actual viewing situation." (1998:526)

Viewing television, or videos, can be a social happening in itself. In the case of children who do not have videos at home and occasionally borrow one this is certainly the case. But such social happenings can also be birthday parties and similar events where children watch television or videos.

Television related topics can provide an important ground for forming relationships and identities. Children frequently talk about television programmes with their friends -- schoolmates. They talk these programmes over and provide/gain information about episodes they might have missed. The influence of television in the formation of collective identities does not necessarily occur in the form of fan groups but can provide a basis for maintaining relationships and being involved in collective activities (such as television related role play). Television related talk does not, however, occur only in relations with peers. It is also an important element in family relationships. A child can, for example, ask her parents to watch a programme that she cannot watch because it is on too late and tell her about it the next day. Interactions like this one seem to strengthen family relations.

Parents use television as a disciplining tool. Television programmes can also be incorporated within children's daily regimes as markers of time for different activities such as homework writing. Children are obviously well aware of parents' uses of

⁵⁹ Although the project is still in progress its preliminary results are published in the

television as such a tool and they are equally aware of the rules that apply to television viewing. Yet, there seem to be ways in which children can avoid obeying such rules. These ways are partly due to the parents' inconsistency regarding rules related to television viewing but also to children's abilities to "deceive" their parents or to grasp opportunities when parents are too busy or involved in other activities than controlling what their children watch on television.

Apparently, parents are more concerned and try to have more control over the content of television programmes that children watch rather than over the languages in which children watch television. It has actually surfaced during discussions in the Hungarian school that children would, in the company of their parents, watch programmes in Slovak that they would otherwise not select themselves. Although these programmes mostly included news I find it still significant that despite active intervention parents may influence children's "language choice" in an indirect way. In this connection one needs to bear in mind the variety of languages that are spoken in some households, which is particularly true in the case of the children attending the Slovak school.

Children have demonstrated a variety of skills and a great deal of independence in the selection of television programmes. Children show a variety of habits regarding the selection of television programmes, some of which reflect the family context of television viewing (such as alerting others about their favourite programmes or watching programmes for family members when they are not present).

Language choice

Language choice

In terms of language choice and media my findings raise a number of issues and further questions that need to be explored. It is obviously parents who exercise most control over children's language choice. They are the ones who decide about the language of education, language/s that is/are spoken at home as well as languages that television is watched in at least partly. I do not suggest that parents control languages in which children watch television directly; rather it is the content of television programmes that influence parents' choice of what they watch together with their children. Obviously though if a parent feels comfortable using a particular language s/he is less likely to select a programme in a non-preferred language. I do not argue either that parents influence on what children watch on television is consistent and all pervasive. I have already suggested that despite parents' influence it is children themselves who decide about what they want to watch. Nonetheless, since the majority of interviewed children do not have a television set in their bedrooms there is a need to consider the sharing of the television set with all members of a family.

For the children attending the Hungarian primary school the language that they most of the time speak at school and at home and watch television programmes in is Hungarian. In the interviews with children from the Slovak school a larger variety of languages spoken at school, home and in which programmes are watched were given. Children speak Slovak at school during the classes and Slovak and/or Hungarian during breaks at school. Those who speak Slovak only speak it at home as well and tend to watch television programmes in Slovak. Children who speak Hungarian at home either watch programmes in Hungarian only or in Hungarian and Slovak. Yet, the majority of children tend to, if not speak both languages at home, then at least watch television

programmes in both languages. Regarding other languages in which television programme are watched, in both schools Cartoon Network and thus English prevails in cases of children who have access to satellite or/and cable television.

In terms of an understanding of one's identity or belonging to a national/ethnic group, children show awareness of "categories" despite the fact that they do not use the abstract terms like nationality and ethnicity due perhaps to their age. They tend to define their identities in terms of languages they speak or belonging among Slovaks or Hungarians. The mingling of languages that most children attending the Slovak school are exposed to seems to provide these children with a less ambiguous attitude to the Slovak language at least in relation to television viewing and in terms of characterising themselves as its users. Children in the Hungarian school show more ambiguity regarding the status of Slovak language: they clearly identify its importance but do not regard themselves as its users per se.

Language competence, apart from family influence, seems to be an important factor in children's selection of television programmes broadcast in local languages. However, the same factor does not discourage children from viewing Cartoon Network. Rather than trying to bring this in relation with local language competence I would argue that it is Cartoon Network's unique programming (when compared to other locally available television channels) that makes language competence relatively unimportant in its viewing. There are exclusively cartoons broadcast on Cartoon Network throughout the day, specific cartoons are broadcast at regular times on a daily basis (often even more frequently) in a larger variety than on local channels. It is also likely that both parents and children themselves think of Cartoon Network as an a specifically children's channel. In comparison with Cartoon Network local channels tend to allocate time slots for children's programmes and there are no children's channels available.

I have already suggested that parents are primarily concerned with content of television programmes. I am aware of the limitations of the sample of parents. Yet it also became clear from children's accounts that parents do not perceive language competence in relation with foreign language channels as a significant issue. Indeed, it appears to be the case that parents attribute positive influence on children's language skills to watching television programmes in foreign languages. It also needs to be stressed here, however, that there is a clear generational difference between children and their parents. Parents still largely belong to a generation that was prevented from learning foreign languages under the communist regime while their children already learn a foreign language as second-graders (as the majority of children in both schools do). Interviews with parents show that parents feel more comfortable in watching programmes in local languages. I would also argue that this difference is due to the forces of consumerism and globalisation that these parents have been exposed to during the last decade and still often feel rather distrustful of the "Western" ways while their children were already born into a "consumerising" and globalising society and have no knowledge of the previous ideological and economic system.

In terms of the status that children attribute to different languages two significant points have to be made. First of all, children are aware, in relation to the particular geographical area that they come from, of the importance of local languages. Yet, at the same time they value foreign languages, especially English and German very highly. Overall the latter mentioned languages are understood as more important for reasons that are connected with globalisation, such as the increased opportunity to travel abroad and form personal relationships as well as the changes in labour market.

When analysing cultural markers that children identify one realises that they clearly distinguish between locally made programmes and those imported mainly from

the United States. The identification of the country of origin is not always entirely accurate but one needs to bear in mind that in the case of programmes broadcast on Hungarian and Slovak television channels they are all dubbed so language is of almost no help in identifying the country of origin. One of the interesting features of discussions about cultural markers is the more in-depth knowledge of characteristics of dubbing that was demonstrated by children in the Hungarian school. Two possible explanations can be given for this. It is either that children in the Hungarian school are more informed on this issue than those in the Slovak school because dubbing on Hungarian television channels is in general of a lesser quality than that on the Slovak channels. One can argue, however, that there are also children in the Slovak school who watch programmes broadcast in Hungarian and yet they did not discuss the issue with the same knowledge. To this one can suggest that children in the Slovak school tend to watch mostly in either in Slovak and Hungarian or in Slovak only so in that case they would watch less of Hungarian television than their counterparts in the Hungarian school. The other explanation could be that children in the Hungarian school are more aware of language differences because they are formally learning at least one more language when compared to their counterparts in the Slovak school who are not learning Hungarian formally.

Another interesting feature is that the Czech language would come up more frequently in the Slovak school during discussions either as a language that children considered important or wanted to learn or in terms of programmes made in the Czech Republic than in the Hungarian school. It can be explained by the fact that Czech programmes are broadcast in the original language on Slovak television, moreover they

are understandably broadcast more frequently on Slovak television channels than on Hungarian ones⁶⁰.

I have already argued that children in both schools show awareness of belonging to the Hungarian or Slovak ethnic group. Despite the already suggested feeling of ambiguity to the Slovak language shown by children in the Hungarian school and the tendency to use Hungarian more frequently both in school and at home as well as in the television viewing context, children in the Hungarian school demonstrate an awareness of the need to speak Slovak. Their reasons are in some ways simple and utilitarian rather than based on identity or rootedness yet of equal importance as the reasons presented by children from the Slovak school. Indeed, the reasoning about the importance of local languages bears similar characteristics in both schools.

Children in both schools also show awareness of the local, regional and global at least in terms of language use. Their arguments imply that locally it is important to speak Hungarian. Already if we think in terms of a region (take western Slovakia or Slovakia) it is equally important to speak Slovak and in more global terms it is inevitable to speak foreign languages. The importance of foreign languages is one of the issues that all children unanimously agree upon.

I have already implied that language choice and the understanding of local identities is problematised by globalising tendencies. It would be premature to draw conclusions from this research project about the possible influences of global media on children's perception of identities. The issues need to be further explored. Despite that, I suggest that children show an awareness of globalising tendencies together with an understanding of the realities of their "local lives". This is true not only in language

⁶⁰ Czech fairy tales are almost legendary not only among Czech children but Slovak ones as well. However, these are not broadcast on the Hungarian television channels, apart from a few successful Czechoslovak cartoons.

terms but even more strikingly in terms of identification with television characters. Not a single character that children identify with, and indeed not many programmes that they give as their favourites, are "locally produced". In this sense my findings resemble those of Lemish et al.

In our study we find support for the two parallel processes: one of adoption of a global perspective on social life, and the second of coexistence of multi-cultures, even hybrid one in the lives of youngsters. ... For children growing up in our world today this is not an either/or situation, but one of 'let's have it all, and have it on our own terms'. This seems to hold true not only on the national level, but for various cultural groups within each nation as well. (1998: 554)

The influence of media globalisation on children's lives is gaining a new dimension in the East Central European region with the increasing spread of new media technologies (computer and Internet related ones, for example) which has so far not been explored in any depth. The re-constitution of the social fabric as well as economic status are likely to play a significant role in the availability of such new media technologies in a region where videos and satellite/cable television are still considered new media by many.

My research project highlighted a number of questions that need to be further explored. Differences in children's language choice related to television viewing can significantly change at a later age. One can argue that as children attending the Hungarian school acquire a better knowledge of Slovak their choices will become increasingly less dependent on language. On the other hand, children's increased fluency in foreign languages may well encourage viewing more varied programmes on foreign language channels apart from Cartoon Network.

Children's use of other electronic media than television also needs further exploration. The use of television should be related to other electronic media available both at home as well as in the educational environment.

There is also a possibility of studying the use of electronic media in relation to the emergence of consumerism in the East Central European region. In many respects parents' choices that may be influenced by the legacy of communism would provide interesting and challenging material for research projects.

CONCLUSION

An ethnic-linguistic understanding of nation that is prevalent in the East Central European region has severe consequences for majority as well as minority populations. This bears special significance in a region that is ethnically mixed and has witnessed frequent changes of borders and different attempts at "purifying" the makeup of states. Involuntary exchanges of inhabitants, ethnic cleansing, serious impediments of minority rights and abuses of power have in one country or another played a role in attempts at equalling the state with nation not only on an abstract level.

In a region that has a rich history of ethnic conflict every time borders are shifted and new states created the historical heritage together with the specific ethnic-linguistic understanding of national identity may manifest itself in varieties of nationalism. One can argue that the restrictions imposed on minorities in Slovakia during the time of the Mečiar government are minor in comparison with ethnic conflicts in the Balkans. Yet already such relatively "benign" efforts at creating a homogeneous nation brought distress and real-life consequences for all the five million inhabitants of Slovakia.

My study suggests that the consequences of an ethnic-linguistic understanding of nation and the construction of Slovak nation as a homogeneous one result in the creation of a specific set of political, cultural, social as well as linguistic circumstances. These influence children's language choice which I studied in relation to television viewing. It

can be argued that children belonging to the Hungarian ethnic minority group and attending the Hungarian primary school demonstrate stronger boundary maintaining behaviour in terms of language choice than their counterparts attending the Slovak school. It has also emerged that language competence is an important factor that influences children's language choice in relation to television viewing thus demonstrating a need for maintaining an environment in which language acquisition is encouraged (for example in the educational environment) if language choice is to be made truly informed.

Children show an awareness of the importance of global as well as local influences. Within the sphere of local realities of their everyday lives they demonstrate a clear awareness of belonging to one ethnic group or the other yet at the same time understanding their relationship to the Slovak Republic as their country of residence. The duality in terms of identities is evident in children's relationship to their mother tongues and official language; this is especially evident in the case of ethnic Hungarian children attending the Hungarian primary school.

Families play a decisive role in the early years of children's socialisation and enculturation. The role that parents play in children's language acquisition and consequent language choice should not be underestimated. This influence does not necessarily demonstrate itself in a direct manner but remains nonetheless very important. One of the areas in which parents exercise their control over children's language acquisition is the area of education. I have demonstrated that schooling in Hungarian has become a central issue both in the cultural as well as the political lives of Hungarians living in Slovakia. One also needs to bear in mind the variety of languages that are used in some southern Slovakian households as was demonstrated especially in the case of children attending the Slovak school.

Although minorities living in the territory of the Slovak Republic are, arguably, integrated into the society the way in which Slovak national identity is constructed makes that integration unsatisfactory for individuals on both sides of the perceived dividing line. Radically new approaches, for example in minority language teaching, that would make integration more of "belonging" are, however, refused by minorities since there are no guarantees (as democracy is only in its early years in the region) that their needs and decisions will truly be accepted and taken into account. With the elections of September 1998 hopes have arisen that a "new" government will promote democracy and minority policies that have for a long time been a standard in multicultural societies in the West. However, the circumstances in which children are socialised and enculturated into national and ethnic identities and cultures and which have an impact on their subsequent understanding of their own identities and identities of other citizens of Slovakia will not change overnight. The processes that involved the construction of a homogeneous national identity under the Mečiar government have long-term impacts that cannot be annulled immediately. Moreover, nations are in popular imagination often perceived not as constructs but as having a real life of their own.

A radical re-conceptualisation of the public sphere is also needed in Slovakia both in order to promote democracy as well as for more tolerant interactions between its citizens regardless of their ethnicity. This, however, is only partly the responsibility of the new government. One of the first steps that was taken after the September elections was an attempt to turn the discredited state-run television channels STV1 and STV2 into objective public broadcasting. This step was greeted with relief and optimism. In terms of minority language use the government is supposed to introduce a law regulating the use of minority languages in official conduct in April 1999 that would comply with

legislation of established democracies as well as with ethnic minorities' constitutional rights. In terms of minority cultures the amounts of subsidies have been the subject of fierce debates in the Slovak National Council since the government has to introduce severe cuts in its expenditure. Perhaps the most radical change is the presence of Hungarians in the Slovak government. Although this would in many countries be considered an ordinary event in Slovakia it was understood by many as the beginning of the period of reconciliation. Moreover, a member of the Hungarian Coalition Party was appointed into the position of the Slovak government's deputy chairman for minority issues and human rights. Further work on establishing legal and institutional frameworks for the protection of *all* citizens not minorities exclusively is urgently needed. This includes the position of the ombudsman and agencies that would increase transparency on a number of levels.

I believe that more radical changes are needed in order to end with polarisation and divisions that influenced the society for the past five years. Such changes would include involvement of local authorities in the provision of education and also parliamentary representation of ethnic minorities. These changes are unlikely to happen during the electoral period of the current government. This is only partly due to the government's vision of nation/society, more importantly it is to a large extent due to the fact that the legacy and appeal of Mečiar's political practices is not a thing of the past. For this reason the government is unlikely to get involved in controversial issues that would decrease its chances of re-election.

There are, however, chances that language will gradually become a less politicised area and the processes of socialisation and enculturation may gradually involve a less disturbing duality than the current one. The government has powers in which it can influence the agents that play a role in these processes so that children can

from an early age acquire a more tolerant and open attitude to identity. There is also need for further academic work in this sphere since studies on cultural accommodation, language acquisition, socialisation and enculturation in the bilingual border regions of Slovakia are missing. In addition to all the work done by government citizens themselves, regardless of their ethnicity, must realise that ethnic minorities have not chosen to live in the territory of any of the states but rather found themselves citizens of these states due to often arbitrary creations of borders; they can thus be seen as "victims" of the particular circumstances. Members of ethnic minorities consider the countries in which they reside their homes although they may not show willingness to identify with the particular construction of national identity that does not accommodate itself to their needs. Since accommodation always involves at least two parties, both parties must show willingness to accommodate to the needs of each other. I am not suggesting that majorities should conform to the needs and wishes of minorities rather than minorities should be given the possibility to make decisions over their accommodation instead of having those decisions forced upon them.

The solution that would be beneficial to many countries of the East Central European region since xenophobia and racial and ethnic discrimination seem to be gaining increasing support is a radical re-thinking and re-composing of the concept and construct of nation. Such a re-thinking is unrealistic in the near future as it would involve at least a partial division between ethnicity and citizenship or between nation and state. For the time being, however, this solution is not likely to appeal to any of the majorities (and perhaps even minorities) since nation still maintains its strange quality of realness for many East Central Europeans. Ethnic distinctions often gain superiority over citizenship and belonging to a state. This is understandable since there is no

continuous experience with the influx of newcomers that is an important factor in multicultural countries like Canada.

Yet countries of the East Central European region will sooner or later have to alter their visions of nations as the processes of globalisation are gaining increasing importance in the region. The movement of labour, EU and NATO integration, consumerism are all factors that are likely to contribute to an opening up in the region. Although East Central Europeans are used to buying "global" products and watching "global" programmes on the television, they have not so far experienced first-hand everyday contact with a diversity of cultures. Once some of the countries join the European Union they will become targets of immigrants and refugees from further east which does not only include the countries of the former Soviet Union but reaches as far east as Pakistan. It is difficult to predict the implications of globalisation and contact with a diversity of cultures on local identities. But one can perhaps suggest that since the majority of East Central European states seem to be in clash with ethnic groups with which they have co-existed for centuries without being able to reach an agreement regarding their status, the influx of foreigners is not likely to lead to a weakening of local identities.

For the time being there are many areas to be improved in East Central Europe, even apart from radical attempts at changing the prevalent perception of identities. Governments that struggle with economic crises can hardly be imagined to have the financial resources that are needed for the creation of truly multicultural societies. For this reason the suggestion that language rights be included within individual human rights seems to provide a possible solution that would, at least in theory, decrease the chances of policies that were promoted in Slovakia by Vladimír Mečiar and his supporters.

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